

# STAR WARS CELEBRATION

The Force is strong with this one...

# SEFX

294

THE  
WORLD'S  
**No.1**  
SCI-FI  
MAGAZINE

★★★  
**MARK  
HAMILL  
SPEAKS!**

EXCLUSIVE!

# THE LAST JEDI

★ All you need  
to know about  
Episode VIII

★ The origins of  
the lightsaber

★ Complete  
guide to  
the Jedi

★ Porgs!

“Luke’s story was very  
troubling for me”

Mark Hamill on the Skywalker legacy

PLUS... CHARLIE BROOKER ON BLACK MIRROR ★ GAME OF THRONES ★ WILLIAM SHATNER  
THE GERMAN STRANGER THINGS ★ MARVEL’S AGENTS OF SHIELD ★ GRANT MORRISON

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294

WINTER  
2017

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William Shatner and Adam West first worked together on an Alexander the Great TV pilot (p75).

*The Martian* author Andy Weir wrote 70,000 words of a novel before scrapping it completely (p80).

GETTY (3)



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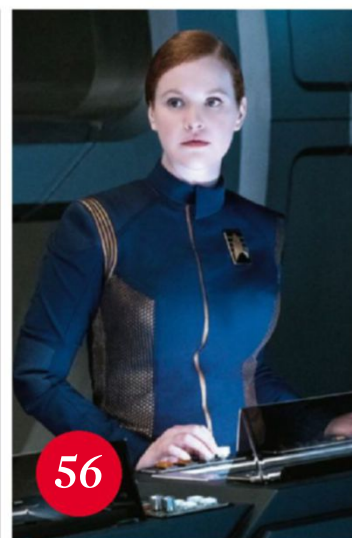
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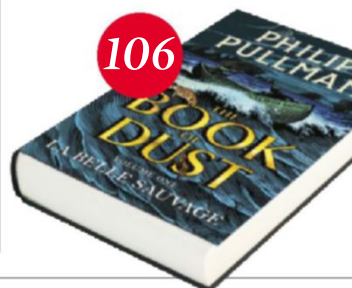
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## Rants & Raves

INSIDE THE SFX HIVE MIND

### RICHARD EDWARDS EDITOR

#### RAVES

→ The Terry Pratchett: *HisWorld* in Salisbury exhibition is a wonderful tribute – you've got until January to check it out! bit.ly/PterryEx  
→ Impressed with *The Gifted*, so far. Hope there's enough story there for it to have legs.  
→ Enjoyed bingeing *The Good Place* – Ted Danson should be recognised as a comedy legend.



### NICK SETCHFIELD FEATURES EDITOR

#### RAVES

→ Loved *Blade Runner 2049*. Set design and cinematography smashed my senses but Ford was a revelation – when was the last time he gave such a nuanced performance?  
→ Enjoying *Star Trek: Discovery* rather than outright loving it. Maybe the sticking point is that this is one starship I don't actually want to be on...



### IAN BERRIMAN REVIEWS EDITOR

#### RAVES

→ Had a hoopy time at the recording of new *Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy* radio series *The Hexagonal Phase*.  
→ Enjoyed Radio Four's *The Haunting* – particularly the episode about a demonic fridge. Check it out on iPlayer.  
**RANTS**  
→ *Star Trek: Discovery*: oh god, will someone please make the Klingons stop talking?



### KIMBERLEY BALLARD PRODUCTION EDITOR

#### RAVES

→ I've waited 17 years for the new *Dark Materials* book and now I finally have it in my little greedy hands.  
**RANTS**  
→ *Blade Runner 2049* is big and beautiful, but it left me cold. K was a boring protagonist, Joi was little more than a fantasy girl and Jared Leto's dialogue was so ridiculous.



### JONATHAN COATES ART EDITOR

#### RAVES

→ It was so worth the (long, long) wait for that *Last Jedi* trailer.  
→ I'm loving all of the fan theories around Snoke's true identity. I'm putting my money on him being a resurrected Obi-Wan – it feels like an idea just nutty enough to get the JJ Abrams stamp of approval.  
→ I'm embarrassingly excited by the Demogorgon action figure on p119.



### JAYNE NELSON WRITER

#### RAVES

→ So happy that *The Good Place* is finally available in the UK – although I feel sad for those who had the twist spoiled for them (bad Twitter gifs! Naughty!).  
**RANTS**  
→ Still haven't seen the new *Blade Runner*, even though I'm dying to... Why don't long films come with intermissions for those of us with poorly backs or other issues?



### TANAVI PATEL WRITER

#### RAVES

→ Hugely impressed with *The Orville*'s maiden voyage. Seth MacFarlane blends his own brand of comedy with the *Star Trek* universe without making it too silly.  
→ Ecstatic to hear Matt Ryan will be reprising his role as John Constantine in *Legends Of Tomorrow* this season. Even a small dose of the demon hunter will make my week!



### WILL SALMON WRITER

#### RAVES

→ Rewatching all of *Buffy* and *Angel*. *Buffy* season four is far better than its reputation suggests.  
→ I love *Star Trek: Discovery*, so far. It's strange and new and more than a little mad, but, at its core, still very much *Star Trek*...  
**RANTS**  
→ ...I do wish they'd ease back on all the Klingon scenes though.



Haven't we been here before? It's only the third time we've had a new *Star Wars* movie for Christmas, but it's a routine we've been happy to get used to. So now, two years after Rey interrupted Luke Skywalker's exile on Ahch-To, we get to find out what happens next in that galaxy far, far away.

We've pulled together enough *Star Wars* goodness to fill a space cruiser. Back in September I had the privilege of speaking to Mark Hamill about an instalment that shows Anakin's lad in a completely different light. We've also chatted with new star Kelly Marie Tran and producer Ram Bergman about a film that's threatening to go where no *Star Wars* movie has gone before, delved deep into Jedi lore, and dissected (not literally!) the Porgs. You can read our epic *Star Wars* coverage from p36.

Back in this galaxy, we've been on set as Charlie Brooker's *Black Mirror* goes a bit *Star Trek* (p52), found out what's in store for *Marvel's Agents Of SHIELD* (p58) and asked William Shatner what it's like to play Two-Face in the latest '60s Batman adventure (p72). And that's before we've even mentioned a super-sized incarnation of the finest reviews section in the universe (p87) – it's no moon but it's pretty damn big.

There'll be more where that came from over the coming months. Why not subscribe and make sure you never miss an issue (p34)?

Rich

Richard Edwards, Editor  
@RichDEdwards

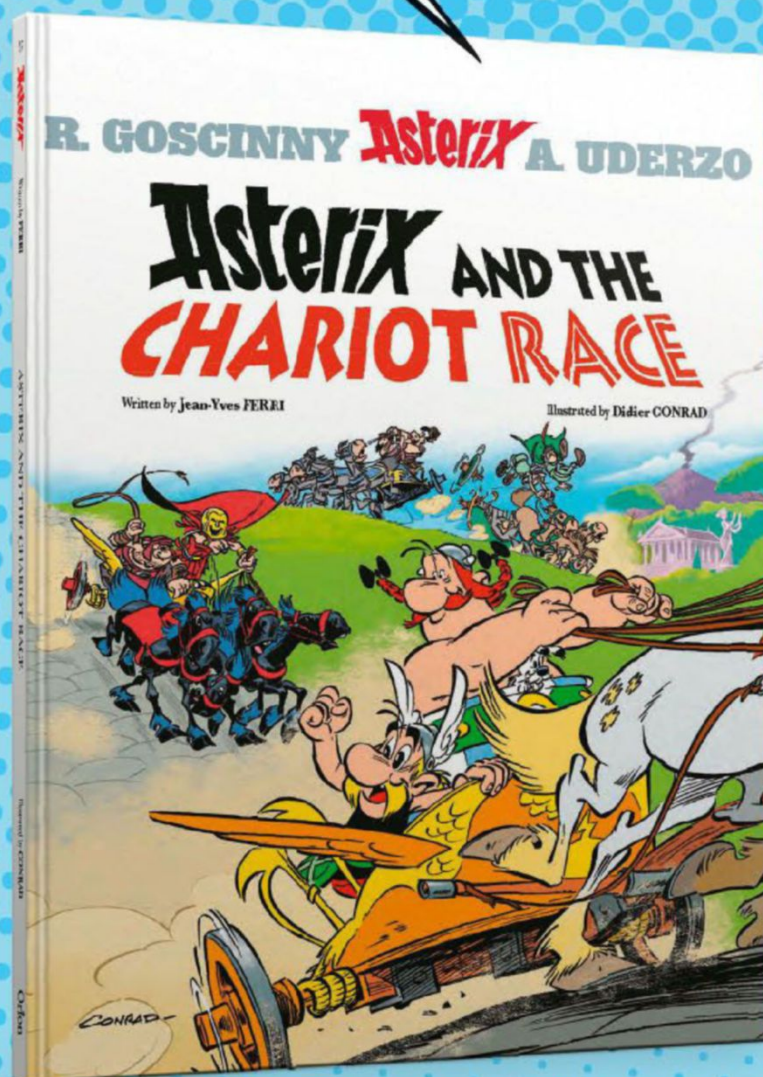




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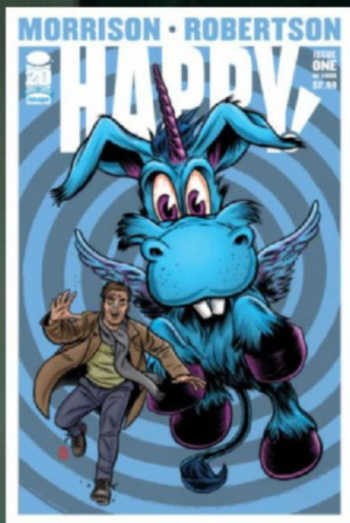
WINTER  
2017

→ NEWS /// INTERVIEWS /// INSIGHT /// NIFFLER → *edited by Richard Edwards*

CREATOR EXCLUSIVE

## HAPPY! CHRISTMAS

Grant Morrison brings  
his mad yuletide comic  
*Happy!* to television



### Highlights



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hometown: the  
early years.



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→ New illustrations  
from *Fantastic  
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#### 20 LIGHTNING STRIKES

→ How *Black  
Lightning* is  
bringing some  
reality to DC.



**SCI-FACT!** Grant Morrison created a vastly different Christmas comic book fable in *Klaus*, his retelling of Santa Claus's origins.



**Ah, Christmas. A time of good cheer.**

Of peace on earth and goodwill toward men. Or a time of sex and violence, when an alcoholic-cop-turned-hitman can find an imaginary friend in the form of a tiny winged horse. A horse named Happy... Legendary comic book scribe Grant Morrison's *Happy!*, illustrated by Darick Robertson, debuted as a four-issue comic book series in 2012. But the writer has expanded his vision significantly for the tale's TV adaptation, debuting this holiday season from Syfy.

"The original comic," Morrison tells Red Alert, "was quite tight and contained and our hero dies at the end. We did it that way because Darick could only draw four issues. But I loved those characters so much. I love Nick and Happy and Meredith McCarthy. So the opportunity to build that world out and build that mythology out... *Happy!* is kind of unusual in what I do. If you're familiar with my stuff, you know it's mostly psychedelic science fiction. *Happy!* was my attempt to do a crime comic. So we've taken that world and made it a little bit more like my other stuff. Honestly, I think the television version is much more like what it would have been if I was given free rein to do 20 issues. The TV version is much more of me than the comic is."

## FULL OF CHEER

In developing the series (produced by Original Film and developed with *Crank* filmmaker Brian Taylor, who also directs the pilot), Morrison tells Red Alert that the show's writers "expanded the world and gave the characters a chance to breathe".

"We introduced a bunch of new, outrageous, Dickensian grotesques. I think we've got something of a huge mythology now. That's been the result of all these amazing people coming to it and adding ideas. Brian Taylor and I co-wrote the pilot and we're co-writing the final episode. And in between we have a bunch of brilliant writers expanding the narrative. These guys are astonishing. I spent six weeks in the writers room in LA. We were all swapping ideas, we were all creating the world. So for me, who usually sits in a room writing comic books, it was a very exciting process."

For those unfamiliar with the twisted world of the comic, Morrison describes it as "*It's A Wonderful Life* meets *Pulp Fiction*".

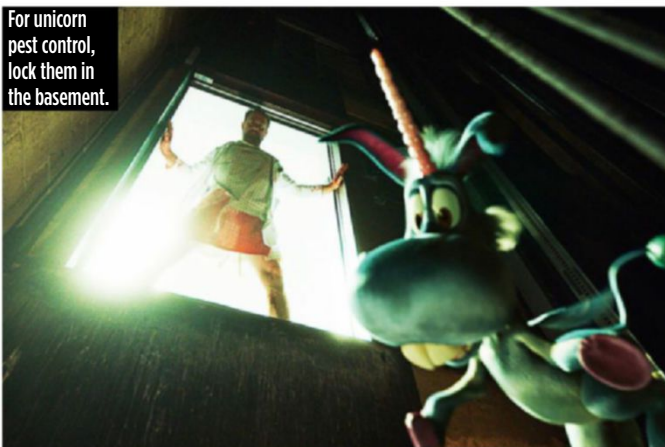
"It has that element of a crime story," he explains, "but at the same time it's an uplifting Christmas story. We've retained that part from the comic book, but we play a lot of different notes. The ending might be different. I'm not going to say too much, but I think it's very much a holiday story. If you've read the book, you'll have the basics, but you won't know what we're going to do in the twists and turns that we have planned. It is complete as one season,

Going to great lengths to be rid of bloodshot eyes.



“We added a bunch of new, outrageous, Dickensian grotesques”

For unicorn pest control, lock them in the basement.



His ailment was serious: chronic ivy growth.







but with threads that we can expand. And a wider universe that we can explore later."

*Happy!* stars *Law & Order: SVU*'s Chris Meloni as its antihero Nick Sax and the voice of Patton Oswalt as his titular flying friend. Of the show's cast, Morrison remarks, "Honestly, everyone is great. Even the guys who play the mobster kids who die in the first issue. Patrick Fischler [as dapper mob enforcer/torturer Smoothie] is amazing. But I have to say that Chris Meloni, that guy is the eye of the hurricane. He's the most charismatic human being I've ever met. What he brings to the whole thing is an absolute commitment. He improvises scenes, he invents dialogue completely in character. So we kind of just stood back and let Chris do his thing. He holds it all together. But around him we have a cast in which everyone put in their best."

Morrison assures us that should *Happy!* prove successful, he has lots more story to tell.

"We're way up to season four. We have a big mythology and we have a lot of stuff worked out. So we hope people love it and we hope we can keep going... I shouldn't say I hope people will love it - I know people will love it!"

And the comic bard tells us we may not have long to wait for his next screen project.

"I'm working on a bunch of television stuff. *Sinatore*, the book I'm doing with Black Mask Studios, is already in development at Amazon. So yeah, I think we'll see a lot more in the future. I'm really enjoying this world." ●

*Happy! airs on Syfy in the US on 6 December.*



We don't trust that silly grin and pink horn.

## HORSE PLAY

Morrison reveals more about the world of *Happy!*



### GOLDEN YEARS

→ For Morrison, today's Golden Age of Television is reminiscent of the late '80s and early '90s, when he and a cabal of British creators first arrived on the American comic book scene. "I think that television right now," he says, "is what *Vertigo* was in the '90s. It's so advanced and there are so many amazing dramas. In the way that I did *The Invisibles* and Garth [Ennis] did *Preacher* and Warren [Ellis] did *Transmetropolitan*... We committed to very long-form dramas, and I think that's what's happening in television right now. It's quite interesting."

### IN THE BEGINNING

→ Morrison tells *Red Alert* that *Happy!* began its journey from comic to TV when it attracted the attention of Original Film, the company behind the *Fast And The Furious* and *Goosebumps* films. "Original Film took an interest in the graphic novel by me and Darick [Robertson]. We came to really love those guys. We thought they were very smart and really good at picking projects. They put me in touch with Brian Taylor, who I loved from the *Crank* movies particularly. We worked on the pilot for a couple of years, and it came to fruition. It really started with Original having faith in *Happy!*"

### LOST IN TRANSLATION

→ Though comics creators aren't often involved in adapting their work, Morrison hopes the situation changes. "I've been involved with *Happy!* all along," he says. "Because I think we should be. I don't know why comic authors shouldn't get deeply involved in the translation of their work on screen. It's a lot of fun, because it's definitely taught me a lot of new tricks."

### HOLDING PATTON

→ Stand-up comedy king Patton Oswalt has long worn his love of comic books on his sleeve, with roles in *The Amazing Screw-On Head*, *Axe Cop*, *Marvel's Agents of SHIELD*, and *Justice League Action*. He's also a longtime fan of Grant Morrison. "I'm a huge fan of his too," admits Morrison, "so it's a mutual appreciation society... Patton was familiar with the stuff and he gets the sensibility. He's also a very smart human being. So he brings a lot of nuance to it that even I wouldn't have thought of. It's very much the product of a super-intelligent man pretending to be a blue unicorn."

GETTY (1)



**SCI-FACT!** First pictured in a panel of 1938's *Action Comics* #1, Krypton earned its element-derived name in 1939's *Superman* #1.

## 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT...

# KRYPTON

Superman's mythical home world gets its own TV show

### SUPERMAN'S GRANDAD IS CENTRAL

**1** Father to Jor-El and grandfather to Kal-El, Seg-El must redeem his family's honour after growing up in the planet's Rankless district.

"The Rankless district," says executive producer Damian Kindler, who developed *Krypton* with David Goyer, "is the oldest, roughest part of Kandor City. The upper class, when they have either broken laws or fallen out of favour, are sent to live in the Rankless district – a domed city, and it's a tough hard-scrabble existence. In our first episode, the House of El is stripped of its rank, and the former Els are sent to live in the Rankless district."

### SEG-EL HAS ROUGH EDGES

**2** "Young Seg grows up learning he's got to be quick with his mind and quick with his fists," explains Kindler. "He's rougher and darker than Superman ever was."

"The elements of this legacy that's out there," adds actor Cameron Cuffe, who plays the beleaguered Kryptonian, "and this sense of whatever it was that his family stood for, he's very isolated from it. What's real to him is just making it through another day. That's where we meet him at the beginning of our story."

### THERE'S A ZOD PRESENCE

**3** Longtime Superman fans will no doubt be shocked to learn that *Krypton* places Seg-El in a star-crossed romance with a Zod – Lyta Zod, played by Georgina Campbell.

"Within Krypton, there's a very precise society," says Cuffe, "and there's a guild system. She's within the military guild. She's a soldier, and Seg is a hustler from the streets. It should be oil and water. Especially in a society that is leaning on very precise ideas about who you are, what can you do, and what you can stand for. So for that to happen is an act of rebellion. This is probably the most central relationship in the show as we start off."

### KRYPTON'S A LOT LIKE EARTH

**4** The show's depiction of Kryptonian society, says Kindler, offers plenty of opportunities to comment on the problems plaguing our world.

"The great thing about this show is we get to talk about issues of race, of reproductive rights, violence, government, and theocracy without going, 'Eat your vegetables!' We get to play it like, 'This is a place where it doesn't matter what colour you are, it matters what the genetic coding is.' What happens when the technology is created for population control and genetic perfection for survival on a harsh planet? How does that affect the individual rights and dreams and aspirations of everybody?"

### THERE'LL BE SOME FAMILIAR FACES

**5** DC Comics fans can look forward to some characters you recognise on Krypton, among them heroes Adam Strange (Shaun Sipos) and Hawkwoman, who travel back in time to stop villains like Doomsday and Brainiac from erasing Superman's legacy.

"Threats from the future can impact the past in a way that rewrites history," teases Kindler. "By the end of the pilot, everything you think you know about Krypton is fake. You're gonna be like, 'Oh my God, the game has changed. The future and the past are colliding!'"

*Krypton debuts on Syfy in the US in 2018. UK broadcaster is TBC.*

Cameron Cuffe stars as Superman's grandad, Seg-El.





## SCI-FACT!

Before starring in *iZombie*, Rose McIver had another brush with the afterlife in *The Lovely Bones*.



The cast of *iZombie* are ready for the fourth season.

SHOWRUNNER EXCLUSIVE

# BUILD THAT WALL

Liv has a new undead reality in *iZombie*

➔ In *iZombie*'s third season finale, the secret of the undead came out as Seattle's residents were turned en masse via a supposed flu vaccine. The new season finds Liv Moore's city walled off, renamed New Seattle and the epicentre of mass hysteria. Executive producer and co-showrunner Diane Ruggiero tells Red Alert that the whole scenario is unlike anything they've ever done on the series.

"We're starting three months later," she reveals. "There's still some humans stuck in [New Seattle] with the zombies and they're kind of freaking out. And then there are people outside the wall who are sick and dying that know their salvation is behind that wall. They're desperate to get in there and they can't. There's a lot of anti-zombie hate-mongering and fear. Maybe we can see what this is reference to in the world today?" she laughs.

What does all of this mean for Liv (Rose McIver), who spent the better part of three seasons

trying to hide her own brain-eating issues? Ruggiero explains, "One of the biggest changes is that Liv is called upon to be a rebel in New Seattle. It brings out a different side to her character. Before she was protecting herself, or other zombies that she knew, and then humans from zombies. Now she still has that noble, heroic side but also a level of rebellion. She's out in the crowd accepting who she is."

That's plenty for just about anyone to contend with, and that means season four won't introduce a traditional Big Bad villain like Vaughn Du Clark (Steven Weber) or Carey Gold (Anjali Jay). "There is so much happening with the story that is dramatic and oppressive, that adding another Big Bad would be like a hat on a hat on a dramatic hat," Ruggiero jokes. "But Blaine (David Anders) is still Blaine. And we have Angus (Robert Knepper), his father, who is a regular." ●

*iZombie* returns to the CW in 2018. The show airs on Netflix in the UK.



## PHIL WANG

THE UP-AND-COMING  
STAND-UP COMIC REVEALS  
HIS GENRE FAVES

### FAVOURITE SF/FANTASY TV

➔ I love the original *Twilight Zone* – I think that's the best sci-fi there is. I got into it because of all the references that have been made about it, like in *The Simpsons*. There's an episode which parodies "Time Enough At Last" where a bookworm survives a nuclear holocaust and is the only man left on Earth. Then he finds a library full of all the books he's always wanted to read, and there's this moment where he picks up the first book and he drops his glasses, which shatter, and he can't read any of the books. I love that. I also really like *Black Mirror*. I think both shows have the same mission statement.

### FAVOURITE SF/FANTASY COMICS

➔ My main vice is comic books. I've been a Batman guy since I was a child. I don't really like the '70s stuff, but I'll take the Adam West show and I love the Nolan movies. There's a really interesting theory by Grant Morrison that every iteration of Batman is actually part of the same timeline, and he actually has been all of the different types of Batman, which I find really interesting. I don't even mind Ben Affleck from the recent films – I thought he was a very good Batman.

### FAVOURITE SF/FANTASY VIDEOGAMES

➔ Sometimes I wonder how many hours of my life I've lost to virtual worlds. I really love *Mass Effect*, though I ended up playing the third game with half the missions I could have, because I didn't realise you could save all those people, and I ended up killing them. I thought it was this story where they all died in really unsatisfying ways!

Phil Wang's *Kinabalu* show is currently touring the UK. [www.philwang.co.uk](http://www.philwang.co.uk)



GETTY (2)



**SCI-FACT!** Olivia Lomenech Gill admits she hasn't seen any of the Harry Potter films – though she has read the books!

## ARTIST EXCLUSIVE

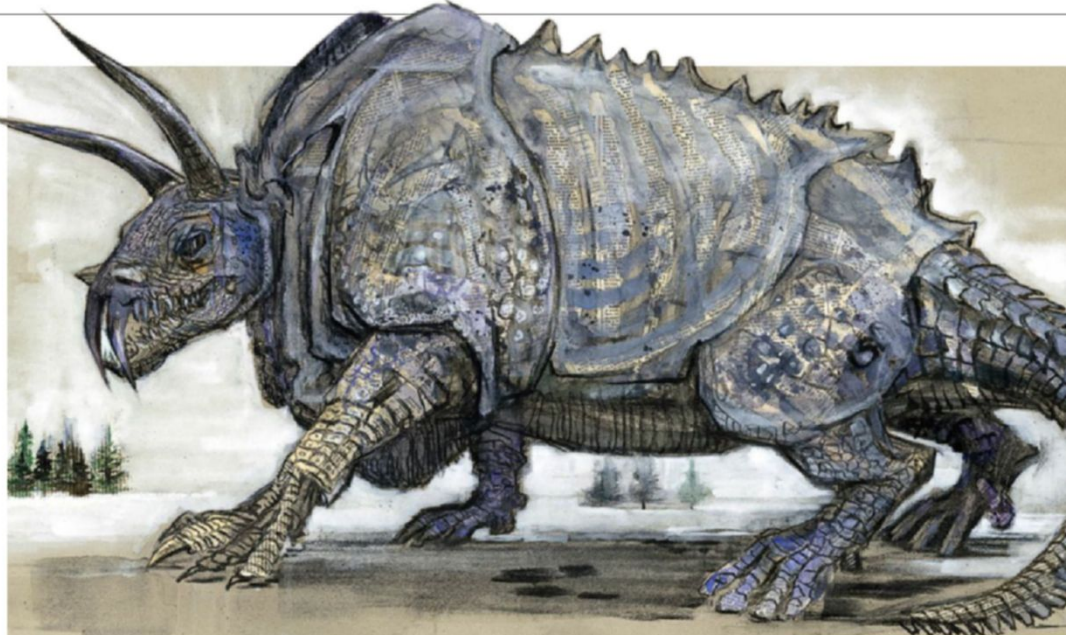
# A BEAST FOR THE EYES

New *Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them* illustrator Olivia Lomenech Gill on bringing JK Rowling's menagerie to life



### SNIDGET

“This one's quite poignant in the book because it's the original golden snitch. I sort of based it on the Kiwi as that's the only bird I could find that was relatively round. I'm not quite sure how it flies in reality because it has spherical wing movements... I depicted a tapestry in the background, which is mentioned in the *Rules Of Quidditch*. It's all about the different ways of trapping them or hunting them. I drew on Mughal art, which was fun to do.”



### GRAPHORN

“This book is very different as it's not part of the Harry Potter storybooks. It's a textbook. That's what I was really excited about. I visited the Natural History Museum reading room, where I was able to look at the original bestiaries, the *Historia Animalium* by Conrad Gessner. What was amazing about them, these first inventories of natural history, was that they were a complete fusion between the real and the totally mad. I am so rooted in reality; I'm unable to make things up, but for me it's about making the ordinary extraordinary. Confucius said: “The wise man marvels at the commonplace.” I had that written in my sketchbook while working on this project.”



### ACROMANTULA

“I did this as an etching plate, which is something I specialise in. All of the black and inky textures, that's done with a copper plate. I also made a model for it, so I have a wax and wire model sitting next to the dragons on my shelf. I looked at spiders and wolf spiders, but this one's probably a bit Shelob, too – there's only so many ways you can draw eight legs and a big round body! I love spiders because they keep my house clean! They're very good mothers, too, apparently.”



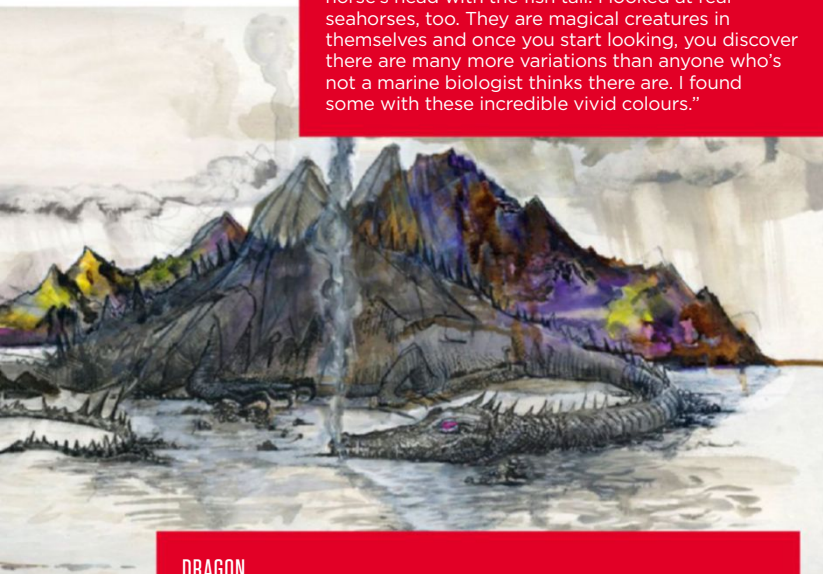
*Fantastic Beasts And Where To Find Them: Illustrated Edition* is published 11 November. Visit [www.oliviagill.com](http://www.oliviagill.com).





## HIPPOCAMPUS

“My husband’s French and we speak some French in the family. If you say “hippocampe”, that’s the French for “seahorse”. The description in the book is very specific – it’s got a horse’s head and a fish tail; that’s all it says! So it’s not referring to a real seahorse, which is why I chose the fusion of the horse’s head with the fish tail. I looked at real seahorses, too. They are magical creatures in themselves and once you start looking, you discover there are many more variations than anyone who’s not a marine biologist thinks there are. I found some with these incredible vivid colours.”



## DRAGON

“This is one of my favourite dragons. There are 10 in the book, which is quite a lot! This dragon is probably a little bit of a reincarnation of Smaug, in my mind. I didn’t purposefully do that, but Tolkien’s own illustrations of *The Lord Of The Rings* were always my favourite. This one I created with pen and Indian ink, and a watercolour wash. They’re the Cuillin mountains in Skye. I was influenced by one of the islands, so the dragon is meant to be part of the island, camouflaged. So next time you go sailing around Scotland, you could find a dragon sleeping there...”



## AERIAL ASSAULT SCI-FI TV ROUND UP

### STOP PRESS!

→ Just as we were sending this issue to the printers, the BBC revealed the companions who’ll be joining Jodie Whittaker’s Thirteenth Doctor on her first adventures in space and time. As long rumoured, *The Chase* host **Bradley Walsh** is coming aboard the TARDIS (as Graham), and he’ll be joined by **Mandip Gill** (as Yasmin) and **Tosin Cole** (as Ryan). **Sharon D Clarke** will also have a recurring role in the new series, set to debut in autumn 2018. The Beeb’s confirmed it’ll be a 10-week run of 50-minute episodes, kicking off with an hour-long premiere. “[They’re] three of Britain’s brightest talents,” says new showrunner Chris Chibnall. “The Doctor is going to need new friends.”



GETTY (3)



A splash stage sounds like the horror of cats everywhere.



## DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE

## MERMAID MADNESS

Japan’s maddest animator, Masaaki Yuasa, talks *Lu Over The Wall*



**Masaaki Yuasa is a Japanese animation director like no other.**

He’s into the trippy, *Yellow Submarine* stuff, using splashy colours, loose ‘n’ playful graphics and cheerfully bonkers storytelling. His film *Lu Over The Wall* is about an unhappy boy in a fishing town who meets ebullient mermaid Lu, who’s forever springing and singing. It’s a sweet tale, with touches of *Ponyo* and *Lilo And Stitch*, with Yuasa’s madness mixed in. How many other films have fish skeletons on the march in piscine zombie parades?

In the story, the town’s older generation see these phenomena as terrifying threats, while the youngsters are more accepting. Yuasa says that’s his vision of how things should be. “I think people are getting more scared by these supernatural things. But what I wanted to express is the acceptance of differences – some people are different, but that’s what they are and how they are.”

Yuasa is already immersed in his next work – an animated horror serial, *Devilman crybaby*, based on 1970s manga *Devilman*. Starring a demonic superhero, it’ll be released on Netflix next year. ●

*Lu Over The Wall* is out on 6 December.

## “DON’T QUOTE ME”

“WHAT WOULD CAPTAIN KIRK BE LIKE 50 YEARS LATER, WITH THE SAGACITY OF MIND, AND YET THE BODY DOESN’T DO WHAT HE WANTS IT TO DO? IT’S AN INTERESTING STORY.”

William Shatner makes a case for telling an old Kirk tale.





**SCI-FACT!** The *Marvel Two-In-One* series ran for 100 issues from 1974 to 1983 before being replaced by a Thing solo series.



WRITER EXCLUSIVE

## DOUBLE TROUBLE

The Thing and the Human Torch embark on a Fantastic Voyage in *Marvel Two-In-One*

➔ Having previously teamed *The Thing* with a host of different characters, classic '70s series *Marvel Two-In-One* is returning in December. Written by Chip Zdarsky and drawn by Jimmy Cheung, it will once again feature Ben Grimm, who will be reunited with his hot-headed Fantastic Four foil, Johnny Storm.

"We've taken the literal title of it and changed up the premise," Zdarsky tells Red Alert. "So now the 'two' is strictly Ben and Johnny for now, and the 'one' is them finally coming together after all this time and being a team again. I'm hoping we manage some of the vibe of the original *Two-In-One*, but I'm more focused on getting the vibe of Ben and Johnny and their familial relationship."

As the title of the opening storyline "The Fate Of The Four" indicates, Ben and Johnny will set out to discover what has happened to the two remaining members of the Fantastic Four, Reed and Sue Richards, who have been missing from the Marvel Universe since the

conclusion of *Secret Wars* in 2015 – so expect to see some other familiar faces. "Ben and Johnny's combined supporting cast and enemies will feature prominently," reveals Zdarsky. "And Doctor Doom helps kick it all off, because writing Doom, especially with how Brian Bendis and Alex Maleev have been portraying him in *Infamous Iron Man*, is a ton of fun."

With *The Thing* rushing to the aid of an ailing Human Torch, Zdarsky insists that writing about the pair as a double act is similar to them being half of a quartet. "Even in *Fantastic Four*, the dominant relationships were between Reed and Sue, and then Ben and Johnny," he reasons. "So it's pretty easy to slip into writing them as a duo. They're brothers without being related, looking out for each other while driving each other nuts, which is really enjoyable to write!" ●

*Marvel Two-In-One* #1 is published by Marvel Comics on 13 December.

NEW AUTHOR

### EMILY SUVADA

MEET THE FORMER DATA SCIENTIST BEHIND POST-APOCALYPSE/ GENE-HACKING YA *THIS MORTAL COIL*



**Did the book have any specific inspiration?**

➔ The first scene that came to me was a blend of a few tropes: I saw an almost feral girl surviving alone in a desperate world, when an enemy soldier arrives to protect her, and she tries to kill him. I kept adding more insane things – a devastating virus, genehacking – until it somehow became a book.

**How fantastical is the science?**

➔ The work being done with CRISPR and other synthetic sequencing technology is incredibly exciting, and the future potential is limitless. As a writer, I had to restrain my vision of the future. The characters in the book still look and act like today's humans, but I don't expect that'll be the case in a future with this kind of technology.

**Did you learn anything unusual from your research?**

➔ One thing that stuck with me is that there are a bunch of people figuring out how to do genetic research at home – extracting DNA using their microwaves etc! That idea definitely made its way into the book.

**Do you hope the book might encourage an interest in science?**

➔ Definitely! We live in a time of incredible technological change, and navigating the future will require more scientific literacy than ever. Knowledge is power and I want young people to seize that power too.



*This Mortal Coil* is available to buy now.



# TAKE A WALK ON THE WILD SIDE WITH TITAN!



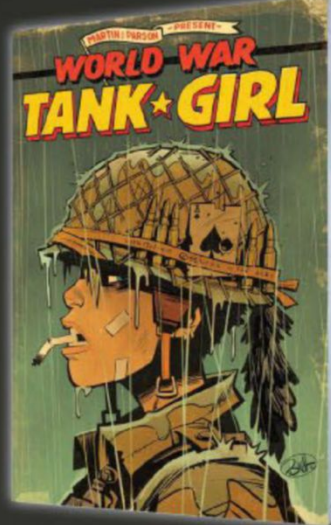
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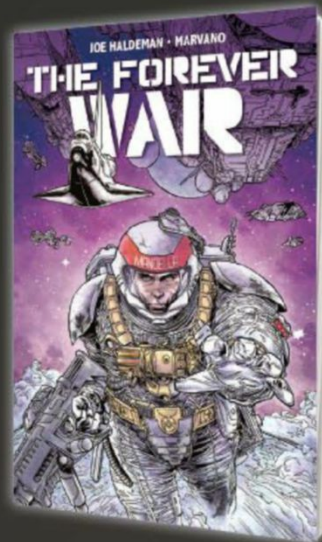
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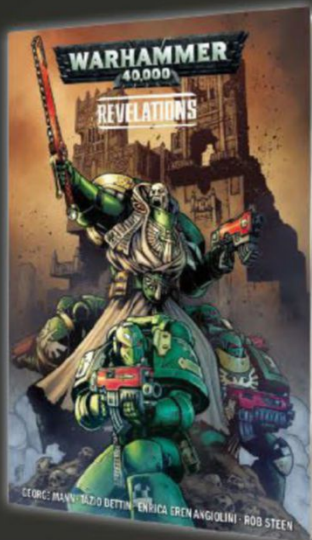
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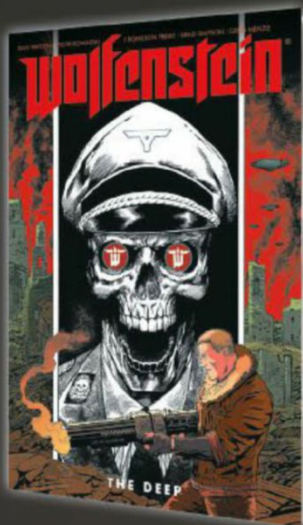
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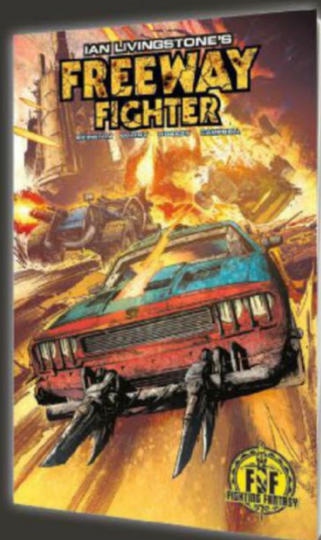
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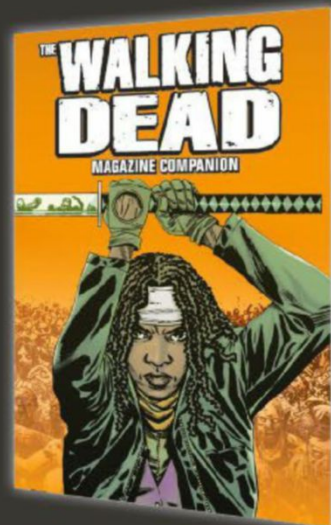
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**SCI-FACT!** Robinson spent four years on the script, working “nights and weekends” to get it finished.

**DIRECTOR EXCLUSIVE**

## ORIGIN STORY

The kinky, controversial beginnings of *Wonder Woman*...

➔ **When writer-director Angela Robinson** started writing *Professor Marston And The Wonder Women*, there was a good reason. “I was so frustrated there wasn’t a Wonder Woman movie,” she tells Red Alert. “There had been tons of Batman reboots and tons of Superman reboots. Even Ant-Man got a movie before Wonder Woman! How many times do we need to see Bruce Wayne’s parents die in an alley? I remember watching *Gotham* going, ‘Again!’? And still there was no Wonder Woman.”

In the decade since Robinson first stumbled on the story of William Moulton Marston, the man behind DC Comics’ female superhero, that changed. Though even with the arrival of Gal Gadot, studio executives were uncertain. “There was a lot of naysaying,” says Robinson (*The L Word*, *True Blood*). “There was a lot of fear.” Fortunately, Patty Jenkins’ *Wonder Woman* was 2017’s biggest hit. “She got Wonder Woman so right – a hard feat to accomplish.”

Given this, the arrival of Robinson’s movie’s is uncanny. “Everybody is really complimenting

me on my exquisite timing,” she laughs. While it’s more likely down to sheer luck, *Professor Marston...* is the perfect companion piece to Jenkins’ film. A psychologist and inventor of an early lie detector test, Marston (Luke Evans) also had an unusual private life, living with wife Elizabeth (Rebecca Hall) and former student Olive Byrne (Bella Heathcote) in a ménage-a-trois. “It’s just this incredible story,” Robinson adds. “Nobody knows about this.”

Much of his life fed into the creation of Wonder Woman, from Byrne’s love of silver bracelets to Marston’s lie detector work inspiring the superhero’s lasso of truth. The trio’s kinky proclivities – bondage, S&M – also found their way into the stories, a fact that engulfed the comic in scandal when Marston was accused of perverting the nation. Despite this, Robinson never wanted to sensationalise. “I wanted to tell a conventional story about unconventional people.” ●

*Professor Marston And The Wonder Women* opens on 10 November.

Wonder Woman felt like going to the roller disco.



**AFTERLIFE**  
CELEBRATING ICONIC  
SCI-FI STARS

132

**SIMON BAMFORD**

*Butterball in Hellraiser*



Having played a supernatural sadomasochist torturer, the Cenobite Butterball, in the *Hellraiser* movies, Simon Bamford has since been busy with charity work and performing in theatre productions internationally. Pinhead probably wouldn’t approve...

**Would you like to play the role again?**

➔ You know, even when they asked me to do the second film I had to really think about it. The make-up was quite an intense experience. There were no eye holes, nose holes or ear holes, and you were sort of surgically superglued into the thing for 14 hours a day, so it was kind of like sensory deprivation! Time went very slowly and it was very disturbing psychologically.

**What would Butterball be doing now?**

➔ He’s a high priest from Hell, so he would still be around. His job was as a torturer but he obviously liked to eat a lot, so I think he might well be presenting *The Great British Bake Off*. He would be perfect because he could eat all the cakes, and if he didn’t like any of the contestants he’d be torturing them!

**Do you have any souvenirs from your time on the set?**

➔ I don’t! Over the years I’ve collected the puzzle boxes, the Lament Configurations – people have given them to me – but I don’t have anything from the original set. I did have a huge poster from the first *Hellraiser* and my crew t-shirts, but I didn’t do the first convention till 10 years after *Hellraiser*. There wasn’t really a huge convention circuit happening, so I ended up throwing them all away!

GETTY (1)



**SCI-FACT!** Laurence Fox has released two albums, *Sorry For My Words* and *Holding Patterns*.



FIVE MINUTES WITH...

## LAURENCE FOX

Lewis's sidekick joins  
*The Frankenstein Chronicles*

### MAN OF MYSTERY

“I play Frederick Dipple. He’s a philanthropist. He’s come to London to help the poor, that’s what he wants to do – eradicate poverty. He may or may not have ulterior motives. I like the fact that he’s a progressive man, clever but mysterious. You don’t know [his motives] until the end, I’m afraid... I definitely survive!”

### ARTISTIC LICENCE

“[I read the novel] when I was at school. The show interprets the book in the loosest possible sense, so it’s artistic licence. I think there are references there to the living dead, that’s where they start other than the clever illusions within it.”

### 19TH CENTURY FOX

“It’s psychological horror nowadays, isn’t it? Horror in that period is... I mean they go all out for the gore. On the show, it’s so gory. There’s something about knives and various daggers, you know, it’s lovely – I mean, not lovely, lovely to reflect that. There’s something more up close and personal, it’s not machine guns from miles away. It’s a great period to have horror in – dark and bleak. It’s a great insight into how people lived back then.”

### THE GREAT PRETENDER

“Yes, fantasy stuff is great, period stuff is great. It’s enjoyable to do, and when you’re trying to take a slash with those 18th century trousers on, it’s heaven! I like to mix up – when you pretend for a living you might as well do as much as possible. I’ve learned to ride horses, to race horses. It’s quite fun shooting guns in jobs I quite enjoy.”

### MUSIC MAN

“I’ve been really busy this year so after this I’m going to look after the kids, then go back to music for a bit and then back to acting.”

*The Frankenstein Chronicles* is airing on **ITV Encore**.



**SCI-FACT!** In the comics, Black Lightning rose to become Secretary of Education under President Lex Luthor.

## SHOWRUNNER INTERVIEW

# RIDE THE LIGHTNING

DC's *Black Lightning* zaps viewers with a dose of reality...



Cress Williams and the on-screen fam feeling pumped.



the aisle...' All the things that we dream of doing while we struggle every day, putting one foot in front of the other, he's got that too."

While Black Lightning will face his longtime archenemy Tobias Whale (played by Marvin "Kronon" Jones III) and his gang, the 100, the show, shot and set in Atlanta, will tackle plenty of real-world issues.

"We chose a real city because we're living in real times," says Akil. "Anybody from Atlanta knows that sex trafficking is huge. We can't ignore that. We want to address that. That's why we chose a real city – because we want people to be able to recognise the villains and the problems that are surrounding us. We're not fighting aliens. We're fighting real villains, and you'll be able to recognise the issues. And this guy is vulnerable, so he can be hurt." ●

*Black Lightning will air on the CW in the US in 2018. A UK broadcaster is TBC.*



**Most DC superhero TV shows begin with their protagonists' origins. Not so *Black Lightning*.**

Based on the character created by Tony Isabella and Trevor Von Eeden, it introduces its titular champion nine years after he retired from fighting crime.

"I wanted him to be fully out of the game," says executive producer Salim Akil, who developed the show with his wife, Mara Brock Akil. "What's interesting to me is not what you're doing it's why you do it and why you are pulled back in. He quit for the love of his family: 'I love my wife, I love my kids, and I'm coming home beat up...' So when [his wife] says, 'I need you to stop,' he did. Nine good years you're on the wagon – because your superpowers can almost be like a drug. So she's telling him to get off this drug."

Now back in the game, Jefferson Pierce (Cress Williams) has two daughters (China Anne McClain and Nafessa Williams) who might just be following in his footsteps.

"It's a family drama," says Brock Akil, "and it's also about, 'How do you be a superhero and a family man?' There's not very often that burden put on most of the heroes. Imagine worrying about dying – and he can die – 'If I go out here and use my gift I might lose the greatest gift of my life, which is seeing my girls grow up, and walking them down



## NEWS WARP

### HIGH-SPEED FACTS

→ **Star Trek:** Discovery to get second season.  
→ **Han Solo** movie finally gets a title and it's, er, Solo.  
→ Apple to reboot '80s anthology series **Steven Spielberg's Amazing Stories**. *American Gods* showrunner Bryan Fuller is on board.  
→ Robert Kirkman confirms that a character will crossover between **The Walking Dead** and **Fear The Walking Dead** (or vice versa).  
→ **The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy** to return to Radio 4 with *The Hexagonal Phase*, based on Eoin Colfer's *And Another Thing...*  
→ **Red Dwarf** co-creator Rob Grant teaming up with *2point4 Children* creator Andrew Marshall for new series **The Quanderhorn Xperimentations**, also on Radio 4.  
→ Titan to bring back **The Prisoner** in comic books by Peter Milligan.  
→ **Armando Iannucci** working on a space comedy pilot at HBO.  
→ Jon Hamm joins **Good Omens** as Archangel Gabriel.  
→ New **Game Of Thrones** unlikely before 2019.

GETTY (2)

## “DON'T QUOTE ME”

**“YOU WANT MOVIES TO LOOK LIKE LIQUID DIARRHOEA, FINE. BUT IT SHOULD BE A CHOICE YOU MAKE, NOT A HOOP EVERYONE HAS TO JUMP THROUGH TO UNMAKE.”**

Director Rian Johnson on TV motion-smoothing settings.





**SCI-FACT!** SF authors Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont regularly contributed scripts to *The Twilight Zone*.

## WRITER EXCLUSIVE

### HISTORY LESSON

The Golden Age is not so gleaming in **Ada Palmer's** Hugo Award-winning *Terra Ignota* series



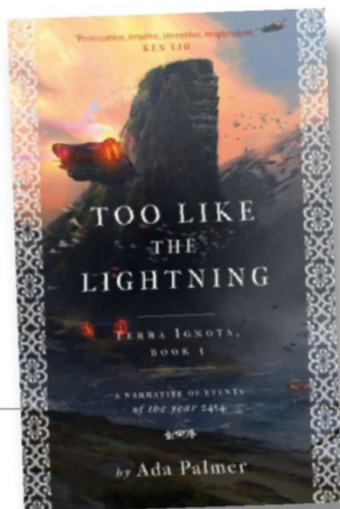
#### The winner of the John

Campbell Best New Writer award at this year's Hugos, Ada Palmer has channelled her work as a historian into her *Terra Ignota* quartet. Set in an apparently utopian 25th century world that has been divided into seven "Hives", it centres around genius convict Mycroft Canner and enigmatic teenager Bridger.

"The series is divided into two pairs, so the first two books – *Too Like the Lightning* and *Seven Surrenders* – fit very tightly together, and the second two are more separate," Palmer tells Red Alert. "Mycroft says that he is going to describe the 'days of transformation' which have changed the world, so over the first two books we see the events and revelations that trigger the transformation, and at the end of *Seven Surrenders* we understand why this world can never be the same."

Third instalment *The Will To Battle* and the fourth volume focus the consequences of what has happened. "We see the many characters, do what has to be done now that the gears of history are turning and cannot be stopped," teases Palmer. "In it, we see how people conduct themselves in a time of crisis, and watch the birth of the new shape that the world will take." ●

*Too Like the Lightning* is out now. *Seven Surrenders* is published on 30 November and *Will To Battle* on 19 December.



## WRITER EXCLUSIVE

### MYSTERY PLAY

**The Twilight Zone** is set to send chills down your spines this Christmas

Want to get a handyman in to look at your TV?



#### After furtively watching re-runs of

*The Twilight Zone* while growing up, *Mr Burns* playwright Anne Washburn is now adapting the long-running CBS anthology series for London's Almeida Theatre.

"It's about mystery, and the mysterious," she tells Red Alert, "and the theatre is quite naturally a place of mystery and of mysteries."

"When I was thinking about which episodes to adapt I'd ask people, 'What *Twilight Zone* episode scarred you as a child?' which is a question to which every American has an answer," she tells Red Alert. "I was really intrigued to investigate *The Twilight Zone*, which is a part of the cultural weather. I'd never thought very carefully about it, but it felt quite formative."

Admitting that she has "taken some liberties to adjust them for the stage," Washburn and director Richard Jones carefully considered what episodes should be included. "There are some, which are brilliant on the screen but

would be senseless in the theatre, or are brilliant in the context of back then, but are exposed and dated now," she reasons. "The series is a funny beast because TV writing at that time was just emerging from theatre, so many of the episodes have the pacing and rhythm of play scripts, but at the same time, they also had a very distinct visual style. Some episodes really couldn't have the same impact on the stage but others work beautifully and in some ways are now even better."

Insisting that "the tensions and concerns which underlie the series are timeless," Washburn says that some episodes are perhaps ominously prescient. "There's a wonderful one we thought of doing, 'The Midnight Sun', about the Earth heating up, which in 1961 seemed fanciful but now feels a bit too on the nose!" ●

*The Twilight Zone* is on at the Almeida Theatre from 5 December to 27 January.





Nick Setchfield's

## DEVELOPMENT HELL

Your monthly glimpse into Hollywood's hoped-for future



HOLD THE NUPTIALS!

### THE BRIDE OF FRANKENSTEIN

❖ The Bride isn't making it to the church on time. Universal has paused pre-production on **Bill Condon's** remake of the 1935 creature classic. The studio has also scratched the intended 14 February 2019 release date. **David Koepp** is now performing rewrites

on the screenplay, rumoured to downplay connective tissue to the Dark Universe franchise that sputtered into half-life with *The Mummy* earlier this year. Condon tells Collider his focus is purely on the film: "What I'm doing is 100% making a really good monster movie. It has nothing to do with anything else. Nothing. Zero." The helmer adds, "What I love about

David Koepp's script is he turns everything on its head. This is Eve before Adam, the bride comes first." **Angelina Jolie** was originally in the frame for the Bride but her commitment to *Maleficent 2* might see her bow out – if she does, Condon's back-up choice is said to be none other than that wondrous Amazonian princess **Gal Gadot**...

GO, GO, GOMEZ!

### THE ADDAMS FAMILY

❖ Creepy? Check. Kooky? Check. Mysterious and spooky? Check. Altogether ooky? The ookiest. Yes, it's the Addams Family, destined for a big-screen comeback courtesy of *Sausage Party* helmer **Conrad Vernon**. Named for cartoonist Charles Addams, who illustrated their proto-goth



lifestyle in the pages of *The New Yorker*, the macabre brood were immortalised in a 1960s TV show before enjoying an early '90s revival in the cinema (we'll draw a discreet pair of gold harem pants over MC Hammer's soul-curdling spin-off single "Addams Groove"). Here's the twist: the new movie will be an animated feature, which kinda makes it the spiritual Cousin Itt to Hanna-Barbera's '70s cartoon version. The screenplay's by **Pamela Pettler**, no stranger to the ghoulish given her work on *Corpse Bride* and *Monster House*.

## HOW'D YA LIKE THAT?

### AKIRA

❖ *Thor: Ragnarok's* **Taika Waititi** is the latest director linked to a live-action version of iconic manga *Akira*. "There's been some chats," he confirms to *IGN*. "[It's] something that I [am] passionate about... I actually love the books. Love the [1988] movie but I would not do a remake of the movie. I would do an adaptation of the books." There's been talk that the film will relocate the action from Neo Tokyo to New Manhattan, enlisting such Hollywood faces as Kristen Stewart and Garrett Hedlund, but Waititi's vision hews closer to Katsuhiro Otomo's original epic of bike gangs and psychokinetic powers. "Asian teenagers would be the way to do it for me," he reveals. "Like no-name, sort of unfound, untapped talent. Yeah, I'd probably want to take it a bit back more towards the books." **Leonardo DiCaprio** remains onboard as producer.

## CAJUN HEAT!

### GAMBIT

❖ Original *Pirates Of The Caribbean* helmer **Gore Verbinski** will bring Southern-fried mutant Remy LeBeau to the screen. 20th Century Fox's *X-Men* spin-off has been locked in the George Foreman grill of Development Hell for some time now, marinating in the sweet juices of departed directors Doug Liman and Rupert Wyatt. With Verbinski signed, the studio has announced a new release date: 14 February 2019. Yes, the ideal Valentine's date flick.



→ **Kate Winslet** reteaming with **James Cameron** on the *Avatar* sequels... Lionsgate adapting **Adrian Tchaikovsky's** *Children Of Time...*

**Hilary Swank** joining post-apocalyptic thriller *I Am Mother...*

**Mike Vukadinovich** the new writer on the *Beetlejuice* sequel... **Reid Scott** in talks to join *Venom*,

with a screenplay by *Fifty Shades Of Grey's* **Kelly Marcel**... **Joachim Ronning** in talks to direct *Maleficent 2* for Disney...

**Judy Greer** in the frame to play **Jamie Lee Curtis's** daughter in the new *Halloween...*

**Phil Lord** and **Chris Miller** set to helm an adaptation of **Andy Weir's** new novel *Artemis...*

Paramount planning a *Sonic The Hedgehog* movie, blending live action and CGI... **Monica Bellucci** joining SF horror *Nekromancer...*

**JJ Abrams** producing live-action remake of anime *Your Name...* The Henson Company developing a remake of *Flight Of The Navigator...*

**Kyle MacLachlan** joining **Cate Blanchett** in *The House With A Clock In Its Walls...*

**Robert Kirkman** producing an adaptation of comic book *Kill The Minotaur* for Universal...



## “James Cameron has wiped *Terminator 3, 4 and 5* from existence”

**Channing Tatum** will fling the cards in the lead role while **Daniel Craig** is said to be first choice for primary villain Mr Sinister – Mr Misunderstood to his mother. Other sources claim Candra the Benefactress, telekinetic leader of the Thieves' Guild, will be the movie's chief antagonist. Oh, fight it out, you two.

## THE HORROR, THE HORROR!

### THE NEW MUTANTS 2

❖ We've seen the goosefleshing trailer for next April's *The New Mutants*. Turns out it's only our first inkling of a darker, scarier *X-Men* universe. "These are all going to be horror movies, and they'll all be their own distinct kind of horror movie," filmmaker **Josh Boone** tells *IGN*, outlining his plans for a spine-rattling trilogy of adventures. "This is certainly the 'rubber-reality' supernatural horror movie. The next one will be a completely different kind of horror movie. Our take was [to] examine the horror genre through comic book movies and make each one its own distinct sort of horror film, drawing from the big events that we love in the comics." And if you haven't glimpsed your fave mutant yet, don't despair. "We're going to introduce new characters in the next movie as well. Characters like Karma and Warlock... all that will be in future movies." Rubber-reality horror? What, like a satanically-possessed gimp-suit?

## KING'S THE THING!

### THE TALISMAN

❖ It's a good time to be a Stephen King fan. It's also undoubtedly a very good time to be Stephen King. Yet another adaptation of the

horror maestro's work is set to follow *IT* and *The Dark Tower* to the screen. Look, here it comes now, heading out of Maine like a clown-masked hellhound at the wheel of a demonic truck powered by pig's blood. Run! *New Mutants* helmer **Josh Boone** is penning this take on *The Talisman*, King's fantasy-flavoured 1984 collaboration with Peter Straub. It's the tale of a 12-year-old boy who sets out on a journey across America, hunting for a crystal that can save his dying mother. Entering an eerie mirror realm known as the Territories, he gains the power to flip between two worlds... Boone has been deep-mining King's imagination for a while now, writing screenplays for adaptations of *The Stand* and *Revival* too.

## TERMINATED WITH EXTREME PREJUDICE!

### TERMINATOR 6

❖ You have to admire **James Cameron's** dedication. All those years working on next-level camera technology? A front for time-travel experiments. He's just gone back and wiped *Terminator 3, 4 and 5* from existence, establishing a new reality where the next movie is the only true sequel to *T2*. Seriously, check your shelves. He's done it, the lunatic. "This is a continuation of the story from *Terminator 1* and *Terminator 2*," he tells *The Hollywood Reporter*. "We're pretending the other films were a bad dream. Or an alternate timeline, which is permissible in our multiverse. This was really driven more by [director] **Tim Miller** than anybody, surprisingly, because I came in pretty agnostic about where we took it. The only thing I insisted on was that we somehow revamp it and reinvent it for the 21st century." Tim Miller says the film will lean into the advancing years of title star **Arnold Schwarzenegger**: "I think we should embrace his age, and that's what's going to make it interesting and fresh for the fans." Reuniting Arnie and **Linda Hamilton**, the new *Terminator* movie is set to begin filming in spring 2018, and it's targeting a 26 July 2019 release date. ●



Illustration by Paul Cemnick

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# First Contact



## THIS MONTH'S COMMUNICATIONS MONITOR

**NICK SETCHFIELD,**  
FEATURES EDITOR



*So, Star Trek: Discovery – magic mushroom or fungal*

*infection? That's the big question powering this issue's Hot Topic. We wanted your thoughts on TV's edgy new take on the final frontier and you delivered, filling our mailbox faster than Tribbles in heat.*

*This month's Prize Letter goes to Rik Laan, who wins a copy of *Overlords Of The Iron Dragon*, courtesy of our friends at Black Library. If you have burning thoughts you want to share on all things geek, our hailing frequencies are on the opposite page.*

## SFX Hot Topic *Your views on the month's big issue*

### #STAR TREK: DISCOVERY

🔗 **Mark Lissaman, Facebook** Let's be honest – if Gene Roddenberry came up with the notion of *Star Trek* in 2017 this is how it would look. Why would they make a new show in 2017 and try and make it look like it was made in the '60s?

🔗 **Adrian Cranwell-Child, Facebook** Why does it have to be “traditional *Trek*”? As long as it holds true to the ethos and dream that Gene had back in the '60s then that's all that counts. *Discovery* is a modern show (not just in production standards) so it has to reflect the time it was made – which is certainly what *TOS* and *TNG* did.

🔗 **Sean Patrick O'Malley, Facebook** The whole fungus thing is ridiculous!

**SFX Taking a trip on mushrooms? Preposterous.**

🔗 **John Rutherford, Facebook** Setting up the Klingons in this way was terrific. They are the Big Bad once more. I don't understand the criticism over the “new look”. I don't see it as

“new” at all. I read that what we were shown was a religious sect of Klingons we just haven't seen before. There are different “types” of Earthlings after all.

🔗 **Rob Perry, Facebook** I don't have a problem with the new look Klingons. It's simply a design update that is nowhere near as radical as the last update in *The Motion Picture* compared to their look in the '60s.

🔗 **Mark Shaw, Facebook** Didn't the Klingons look like they'd stepped out of an episode of the second series of *Blackadder*? Their costumes looked very Elizabethan. I kept expecting Edmund to pop up!

🔗 **Paul Eatherton, Facebook** The Klingons sound like they're wearing really bad dentures...

🔗 **Anthony J Lombardi Jr, Facebook** The behaviour of the characters was just wrong for *Star Trek*. Burnham never would have risen to the level she was at behaving that way. Starfleet is a military organisation. Where was that military discipline and respect?

🔗 **David Latham, Facebook** They spent too much money. It lacks the “intimacy” of the classic *Trek*. Remember, 1960s *Star Trek*, produced by Lucille Ball, was a low-budget show. Many of its iconic effects cost pennies to create.

The new Klingons are enraged that so many people don't like them!





## Get in touch!

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## “Discovery lacks the intimacy of '60s Trek and its low-budget effects”

Discovery's not a terrible show. It's just your average flashy, big budget sci-fi extravaganza.

🔗 **Michael Garner, Facebook** It's confusing. It's a great show, definitely a *Star Trek* show, but I don't understand them saying it's the same universe as the others. So far the ships have looked to be so much more advanced. They had a robot piloting and laser jail. I just think it should have nothing to do with any of the other shows.

🔗 **David Yates, Facebook** I have no problem with the more advanced look of the show. It is made in 2017, not 1967! To make it look “dated” would have been a conceit that would have patronised the audience. Sometimes we have to suspend our disbelief and remember that it is a TV show and not a historical documentary.

🔗 **Tyler Staud, Facebook** The canon needed a refresh. Everything needs to be bumped up a few generations in terms of tech. Otherwise the show fails to capture a new audience and plummets into the ground again. Unfortunate... but a small sacrifice.

🔗 **Melissa Molenaar, Facebook** I can look past the trivial issues of aesthetic and see a story about a young woman who made a decision she thought was right that had terrible consequences.

🔗 **Julio Johnson, Facebook** It was like watching the best parts of all the other shows threaded together into the best fan service. I loved it.

🔗 **Simon Carus, Facebook** It's like the writers haven't watched a episode of *Star Trek* in their lives.

🔗 **Llama God, email** The only thing that stops *Discovery* from really being classic *Trek* is the way that it treats women. Which is to say, it treats them well.

🔗 **Medium Atomic Weight, email** In the words of the immortal Chancellor Gorkon, “You have not experienced *Star Trek Discovery* until you have watched it in the original Klingon.” majQa' Netflix!

**SFX** Are you sure you weren't actually watching *Pobol Y Cwm*?



We're all big fans of Sheriff Jody Mills and her bloody nose.

### #TROUBLE AT T'MILLS?

🔗 **Tonia Small, email** Hey, *Supernatural* – this is important. Whatever you do, don't mess up *Wayward Sisters*. We love Sheriff Jody Mills and we're thrilled that you're giving her a spin-off series, but please, please, PLEASE don't drop the ball, guys. You tried a spin-off before (a backdoor pilot in season nine, “Bloodlines”, that was terrible) but we didn't know anybody in that. Here, we do, and if it goes wrong, we'll be gutted. Jody is awesome, as is Kim Rhodes, and if the writing isn't there to support them... well, it could undermine everything they've done so far on the series. With such a bad track record of killing off female characters, *Supernatural* needs to give the ones in *Wayward Sisters* life. Please get it right!

**SFX** And if the Winchester boys can get a *Scooby-Doo* crossover then Sheriff Jody deserves to meet the Funky Phantom at the very least.

### #BLADE STUNNER

🔗 **Nicola Rowlands, email** I've just seen *Blade Runner 2049* and I have to say... wow. I really didn't think a modern film could come close to capturing the feel of the original, let alone live up to it in terms of quality or scope, but

this truly is a worthy successor. Everyone seems perfectly cast (yes, even Jared Leto) and though Harrison Ford takes a while to turn up, he's worth the wait, capturing both his original character and the weight of the years that have passed. My only complaint would be the length (2hr 44min) but it never seems to drag – even with very little action every moment seems essential.

**SFX** I was never persuaded by the need for a *Blade Runner* sequel but fair play to Villeneuve – he gave it a reason to exist.

### #SHAPING UP

🔗 **Kiki Rodgers, email** I'm so excited to watch Guillermo del Toro's new film, *The Shape of Water*. I love how he takes an old horror film like *Creature From The Black Lagoon* and transforms it into a star-struck romance. Del Toro is at his best when telling stories like this, the ones fringed with fairytale, where the everyday is imbued with the fantastical. The attraction between women and monsters is also a really interesting subject to explore – the idea that they recognise an “otherness” in each other. From what I've seen so far, the film has potential to be beautiful, bringing del Toro back to telling stories like *Pan's Labyrinth*.

**SFX** Agreed, Kiki – *Pan's Labyrinth* is my favourite del Toro movie and this may be the one that finally matches it.

### #A STATION TOO FAR?

🔗 **Linda Scholefield, email** Ben Aaronovitch is one of my favourite authors so I was really happy to learn that a new Peter Grant book

was being published. I went to my local Waterstones and picked up a copy of *The Furthest Station*. Then I put it down again, thinking “Are my eyes deceiving me? £12.99 for just 128 pages?!” It's a joke – how can the publishers →

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STAR PRIZE





justify charging so much for so few pages? If I'm going to be paying £12.99 for a book I want a proper book, not a short story. It's nothing short of daylight robbery. I have all the previous Peter Grant books in hardback but unless this gets reduced down to half price I will definitely be waiting for the paperback version. So disappointing.

**SFX** We dropped a line to Gollancz, publishers of *The Furthest Station*, and here's what they said: "In creating *The Furthest Station* novella we have gone to great efforts to make this hardback beautiful and collectible, including exclusive endpaper maps of the furthest station itself, Chesham. As Ben and Peter Grant have such a loyal readership we wanted to create a stunning book that can act as the perfect Christmas present for Folly fans everywhere. All Gollancz hardbacks are followed with a more affordable paperback and *The Furthest Station* will be available in such format this March for £7.99. We did look very closely at similar titles from other publishers, and our previous similar publications, and felt we were in line with current pricing trends. That said, we look very carefully at the price of every book we publish, and feedback will be taken on board for future similar publications."

## #DRIVING US CRAZY

Alasdair Murray, email I just wanted to say thanks for your review in issue 291 of the SyFy show *Blood Drive*. Without it I wouldn't have discovered this demented yet entertaining series. It's bizarre, crass and cheesy as hell, but still has far more wit and energy than most new shows can hope for. Apparently, though, it hasn't been renewed for a second season. It's no surprise that something so weird would have trouble finding an audience but for those of us with a strong stomach and dark sense of humour, at least it gave us 13 bloody episodes to get our teeth into. **SFX** At least we have a second season of *Santa Clarita Diet* to fulfil our sick black comedy cravings...



The Man in Black was the master of winter style.

## #KING'S THE THING

Rik Laan, email *The Dark Tower* was a bit of a disappointment. The story was too simple. Peter Jackson made three epic movies out of a small fairytale book (which wasn't good either!), Nicolaj Arcel has done the opposite: it was just a small, simple fragment of a huge complicated story. If you haven't read the books, you were thinking "What is this?"; if you have read them you were thinking "This is it?". Shame. *IT* was more like *IT*. Telling only the children's tale in this first film was a good decision. The kids were wonderfully well cast and the scares were good enough. They could have made this at least half an hour longer though, to better work out the children's "normal" problems (Beverly with her dad, Eddie with his mum, Bill with his parents only caring about the son they lost and even Henry's backstory and so on) and their bonding in the Barrens by making a dam that floods half the place. Looking forward to "chapter two"! **SFX** Pennywise will return on 6 September 2019.

## #WALK THE HEINLEIN

Sam Melendez, email **SFX** recently published a story about the short stories of Philip K. Dick being produced as a TV series [*Electric Dreams*, **SFX** 291]. Do you know if any studio/network has purchased the rights to the works of Robert Heinlein? His short story "They" would make for an excellent movie or TV show with the questions it raises about identity. **SFX** Are you listening, Channel 4?

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## Penny Dreadful

SFX's high priestess of horror

### BORED GAMES

➔ I'm completely at peace with the idea that I'm the only person on the planet who thought Netflix Stephen King adap **Gerald's Game** was garbage. I'm a fan of director Mike Flanagan – loved *Oculus*, loved *Absentia*, loved (the first 20 mins of) *Hush* and I'm not even blaming him, other than for wanting to do the project in the first place. How can no one but me see that this is just a really terrible story? "Woman gets tied to bed in sex game, hubby dies, how does she escape?" is fine material for a short story but when you add in the coincidental serial killer who hangs round the end of her bed fiddling with some bones, you've lost me. On that note – serial killer chiller **The Snowman** is also rubbish. This movie has a sled full of problems but one of them is definitely that it's not a very good story, packing in a smorgasbord of clichés, an obvious twist and a villain with the most hackneyed of motivations. Plus, Aled Jones doesn't even sing the theme tune.

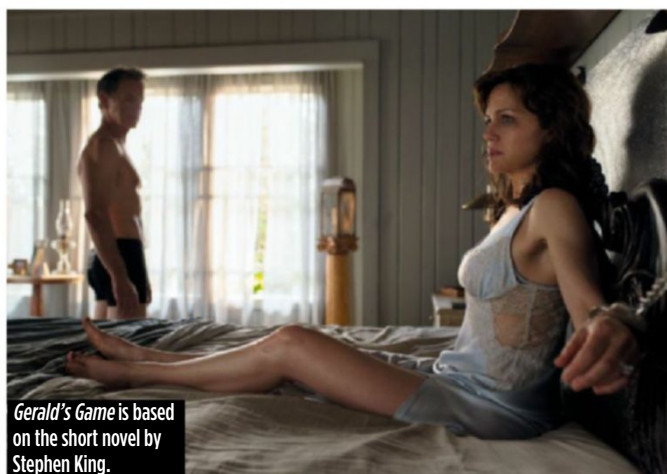
### COLIN'S CHOICE

➔ Movie of the month – an absolute must watch – is **The Killing of A Sacred Deer**, the funny, bleak and strange follow-up to *The Lobster* from Yorgos Lanthimos. Colin Farrell is a heart surgeon who has an odd relationship with a young guy played by Barry Keoghan who threatens to enact a terrible revenge on Farrell's family unless Farrell makes an impossible choice. *Sacred Deer* is allegorical and ambiguous (do I know exactly what happened at the end? I do not), it's disturbing and dark but it's also Beckettian and absurd. It also reminded me of Michael Haneke's *Hidden*, a film about casual lies leading to unnecessary brutality. Fear not, no *Sacred Deer* were harmed in the making of this film.

### LADIES WHO LYNCH

➔ Two more arthouse delights that venture into

Girls are scary, clowns are scary, dolls are scary, beds are not



Gerald's Game is based on the short novel by Stephen King.

horror territory – both which should appeal to fans of Julia Ducournau's coming-of-age cannibal story *Raw*, and explore themes of the power of young women. **Thelma** sees the sexual awakening at university of a girl brought up in a strictly religious household – her passion for another female student unleashes powers in her that she struggles to control. It's a supernatural story of the dangerous nature of being able to have everything you want, when you're not even always sure what that is. Then there's **Thoroughbreds**, the final movie that Anton Yelchin ever made (lending an extra level of pathos). This stars Olivia Cooke as a young woman who euthanised her own horse and claims to be a sociopath who bonds with the very wealthy woman she's been hired to tutor (played by Anya Taylor-Joy) – both are electric and dangerous in a story that turns murderous. Think *Heavenly Creatures* via *Les Diaboliques* with a big dollop of dark humour.

### YEAR OF THE CLOWN

➔ **Happy Death Day** opened in October to excellent box office returns, with **Jigsaw** imminent (at the time of writing) and poised to do well. *Forbes* is reporting that 2017 is on track to be the best year in horror in terms of box office since 1999, the year when cult horror films *The Blair Witch Project* and *The Sixth Sense* were released. *Forbes*

reckons this could be because everything in the world is terrible and people need horror as a form of catharsis (there was a bunch of bad stuff that happened between 1999 and 2002, including 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan), which is a very plausible theory.

I'd like to think, though, part of it is because this year the horror movies that have done well are actually good, with the top five earners being *IT*, *Get Out*, *Split*, *Annabelle: Creation* and *Alien: Covenant*. Not a stinker among them. Bad horror does make money, it's true – the first *Annabelle* took \$257 million worldwide – but it dents our trust.

If I take my friends to the cinema to see a horror that blows, they won't come with me next time, and slowly we descend back into a place where horror fans have to justify the value of their genre to unbelievers who've been burned by *Wrong Turn 6*. Give us quality and we'll give you all our money. ●

### Dreadful thing to watch

➤ *The Exorcist* is now a stage play showing in the Phoenix theatre in London from October through to mid-March 2018. Will there be pea soup? I don't know, but I will by the time of publication – follow me @sfxpennyd for thoughts on the play. Tickets start at £18, head here for info: [www.phoenixtheatrelondon.co.uk/the-exorcist](http://www.phoenixtheatrelondon.co.uk/the-exorcist).







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“DON’T TAKE AWAY WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MARTIAL ARTIST”

GETTY (1)

**hold a black belt in two different martial arts, am the author of a** forthcoming gangster fantasy saga that’s been described as “*The Godfather* with magic and kung fu” (*Jade City*) and a previous novel that’s been called, “MMA in space” (*ZeroBoxer*). I count *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and *The Matrix* among my all-time favourite movies. In short, I love it when the action genre and speculative fiction collide, and when, despite the presence of magic or advanced technology, heroes with killer martial arts skills get to use their fists to wallop the living snot out of villains.

So I have thoughts about what separates a good martial arts fantasy from a bad one, what makes *Into The Badlands* eminently watchable and *Iron Fist* a flat-out disappointment, why *Avatar: The Last Airbender* is such a fantastic television show and such a travesty of a movie adaptation.

The first thing to remember is that martial arts aren’t magic. They appear to be magic because the most dedicated practitioners train so long and diligently that they’re able to do things the average person has a hard time believing is possible. The awe of, “That can’t be...” happens when you watch Olympic gymnastics, see a world-class magician perform sleight of hand, or observe a master chef at work. In fact, the term “kung fu” refers to any discipline that requires patience and hard work (such as writing). Even in a fantasy world, this fundamental reality of martial arts ought to be acknowledged. If a character instantaneously gains fighting power from a magic item or event, he or she is not a martial artist. You can make the art itself magical, the world magical, the people magical, but don’t take away what it means to be a martial artist. It is damned hard to identify with a character who can defeat others without having put in time, blood and sweat.

In martial art stories, the action scenes are character scenes. They are crucial to the story and the character’s development. Which means the actors must be able to express themselves through the physicality of the fight sequences. This starts with casting actual martial artists, and/or making sure actors have enough time to train to be able to perform the action scenes themselves. There is a simply too noticeable a world of difference between watching the long, uninterrupted takes in a fight scene starring Jackie Chan and the dozens of quick cuts necessary to make Finn Jones look good in *Iron Fist* when the work is done by stunt doubles. An equally egregious sin: an over-reliance on CGI and wire-fu that destroys the raw effect of fists on flesh, of bone smacking bone.

Ironically, many a martial arts story has failed to excite me because there was too much focus on the fighting. A convincing fantasy story enables the reader or viewer to believe in magic by making it a natural, accepted part of the world. The characters don’t go around exclaiming magic to each other and they don’t spend 80% of the time showing off dangerous spells for no reason. So why are there still scenes of characters standing in dojos spouting mystical Orientalist claptrap (another problem altogether) or getting into perfectly avoidable fights that don’t impact the story? The fights that exist ought to be necessary and spectacularly good, but please keep the focus where it needs to be: on the characters and their journey. Cool martial arts scenes are no substitute for good writing, but when you combine the two? It’s badass. And magical. ●

*Jade City* by Fonda Lee is out 9 November from Orbit.



# ON BASILISK STATION

by David Weber, 1993

**KB Wagers** celebrates an inspiring tale of starship combat



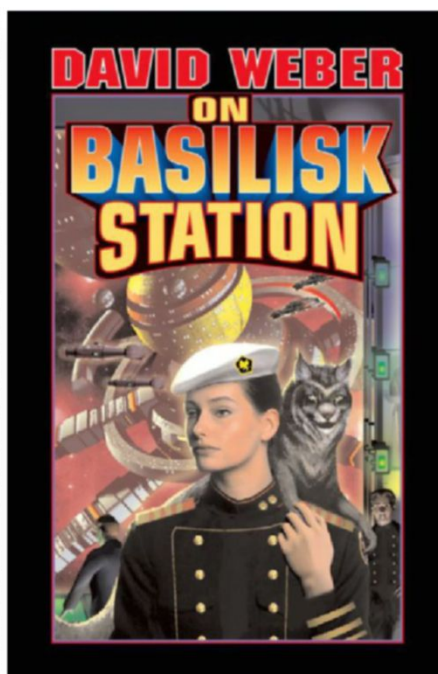
**If you're a fan of science fiction novels**, it's most likely you know the name Honor Harrington, the coolly competent starship captain for the kingdom of Manticore.

In *On Basilisk Station* the hero of David Weber's series isn't the legend she will become. When we're first introduced to the new starship captain and her crew, they've been banished to the Manticoran dumping ground of Basilisk Station for failing to successfully implement an experimental weapon during the annual Naval war games. Once there, Honor struggles to discharge her duty and turn her sulking crew into a team while facing a mysterious threat that could destroy the kingdom itself.

In a masterful display of storytelling, Weber takes on three different plots, weaving together the first rumblings of two political giants about to go head to head, the intricacies of interstellar space flight, and an extremely personal tale of total strangers becoming family.

While no one would claim that Weber's book is the first science fiction work to put a woman at the helm of a ship and the front of the narrative, the tale of Honor Harrington is without a doubt one of the influential stories of the 20th and 21st centuries that has given rise to the world we now live in: one populated by women-led *Star Wars* films, such as *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One*, urban fantasy novels like Lilith Saintcrow's *Dante Valentine* series, and Kameron Hurley's bounty-hunter Nyx from her *Bel Dame Apocrypha* novels.

Honor's cool competence under pressure is a nice change from stories of women learning their jobs on the fly. She already knows what she's doing. When she comes onto the scene,



she's a new captain but not new to command. As readers, we get to see how she uses the skills she already has in order to tackle the impossible task of picketing her station with a single ship. We see this later in science fiction, as women characters are not only the narrators of their own stories but play front-and-centre roles. These stories aren't the tired old tales of a woman trying to learn something new; rather, they are about women excelling at a job or skill they already know.

While conflict and uncertainty often make for interesting stories, there is a certain amount of satisfaction to be found reading a story about

a woman who's good at her job. Women across the globe have proven time and again our competence in our chosen fields and it is vindication to see this reflected in media.

Weber only partially falls into the trap of surrounding his powerful woman hero with men, as there is a generous scattering of women characters in the integrated military structure of the Kingdom of Manticore. However, there is a consistent imbalance in regards to speaking parts for women and several rather consistent – and disappointing – tropes used to illustrate how horrible some of the villains are as the series progresses in the form of gendered slurs and sexual violence. If anything, this is a sign of the times when *On Basilisk Station* was written: women were still anomalies in science fiction, rather than fully fledged participants.

*On Basilisk Station* is hard science fiction with lots of technical descriptions of hardware, battle formations and politics. But for all that, the focus is often on Honor and her companions. The people who make up her crew and the kingdom of Manticore are the ones the reader connects to and cares for as we watch them come together against smugglers and cartel owners.

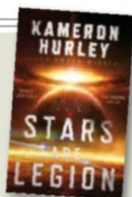
Even Honor herself goes through a metamorphosis over the course of the book, emerging by the end of the novel as the legend fans of the series know and love. ●

*Beyond The Empire* by KG Wagers is out 14 November from Orbit.

## Like this? Try these!

**THE STARS ARE LEGION**  
by KAMERON HURLEY (2017)

➔ This epic tale involves a woman with no memory, a mass of dying ships and a mystery that requires diving into the centre of the world.



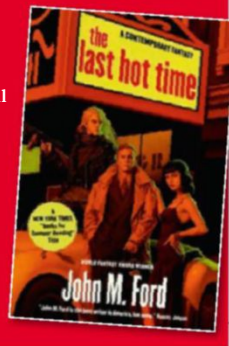
**DARK RUN**  
by MIKE BROOKS (2016)

➔ A crew of misfits take on a run that could deliver a huge payday or kill them. If the Honorverse is a bit much for you but you loved the characters, this will grab you from the start.



## NEXT ISSUE

In our next instalment of Book Club (in SFX 295, on sale 6 December), author Genevieve Cogman will be writing about John M Ford's 2000 novel *The Last Hot Time*, an urban fantasy set in a magical Chicago. If you've never read it before or fancy giving it another spin, here's your chance to prep before a top novelist shares their thoughts.





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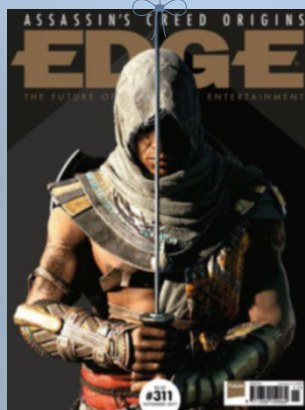


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A

TO BE RECKONED WITH

LUKE WHO'S BACK!  
RICHARD EDWARDS  
HAS AN AUDIENCE  
WITH MARK HAMILL  
TO DISCUSS THE  
RETURN OF  
A JEDI



*The Last Jedi* picks up with Rey and Luke on the island of Ahch-To.

“THESE  
PUNKS THINK  
THEY KNOW  
LUKE BETTER  
THAN ME!”



“

T WAS ONE OF THE MOST elaborate entrances in showbusiness!” laughs Mark Hamill when *SFX* asks him about his blink-and-you’ll miss it appearance in *The Force Awakens*.

You know the one. You sit through the whole of the new, hotly anticipated *Star Wars* movie waiting for a glimpse of Luke Skywalker – having been reunited with Han Solo, Leia, Chewbacca, C-3PO, R2-D2, Admiral Ackbar and even Nien Nunb along the way – and then you get barely a minute of an old bearded guy with a robot hand on top of a remote island. He doesn’t even have anything to say. Has any movie star ever had higher billing (he was second only to Harrison Ford) for less screen time?

“I think it was a practical decision to push my story to *Episode VIII* because the plate was so full,” Hamill explains, impressively diplomatically. “You had to establish all these new characters, you had to honour the end of Han Solo’s storyline, and it would have been too complicated.

I thought the audience would demand that at some point Luke and Leia and Han were all together – I thought that would be a major bone of contention but I was wrong.”

In the two years since *The Force Awakens*, Luke’s meeting with Rey on Ahch-To has become one of the most talked about minutes in cinema history. What was going through the former saviour of the galaxy’s head when his potential new apprentice handed him the lightsaber he’d lost in *The Empire Strikes Back*? Not even Hamill knew at the time.

“[Director] JJ Abrams just said, ‘Turn around slowly, remove your hood...’” Hamill admits. “They were just going to run the camera for an extraordinary long period of time, and I thought I’m going to give them as much as I can, a range from bewilderment to suspicion to anger to doubt to great joy – I turned around one time and was so happy to see her! Then JJ could take what little puzzle piece he needed and do with it as he wanted. I wasn’t really sure what he wanted either. It wasn’t really specified, it was very enigmatic, for a reason, because I’m not sure they even really knew. It’s like a relay where they pass the torch, because JJ writes whatever he wants and then hands it off, then Rian [Johnson, *Episode VIII* director] writes up to the end of *VIII* and hands it over to *IX* without knowing where *IX*’s going to finish. It’s that old cliché line – so crazy it just might work! Who knows what’s the right way to do it? George Lucas handed over his notes for what he thought should happen in *VII*, *VIII* and *IX*, but after selling it to Disney for [indecipherable noise]

billion dollars, they threw it all out and started from scratch, doing it the way they wanted. At that price they’re entitled!”

It’s safe to say that Luke is more than a McGuffin in *The Last Jedi*, the movie alternatively known as *Episode VIII* – he’ll have actual dialogue, for starters – but we know surprisingly little about where he’s at. Why he’s chosen to live on the remote Ahch-To – home to cute critters the Porgs and, smart money has it, the first Jedi temple – is a mystery, for example, as is the exact nature of what he’s been doing since overthrowing the Emperor three decades previously. It’s fairly clear, however, that the wide-eyed boy who first followed Obi-Wan Kenobi on some damn fool idealistic crusade all those years ago is long gone, replaced by a more cynical, greyer model. Indeed, Skywalker is now the wise old hermit living in exile – Hamill is older than Alec Guinness was when he played Old Ben – though his faith in the Jedi Order isn’t quite so unwavering.

“As you know from the trailer, Luke says it’s time for the Jedi to end,” Hamill points out. “When I read it, I went ‘What!’ He was always the most optimistic character, who believed with all his heart and soul in what Yoda and Obi-Wan taught him. I said, ‘What could have happened in that gap that would make him be this cynical hermit who wants to end the Jedi?’ It was very troubling for me, but I came to realise that Rian wanted to do something that hadn’t been done before. If I was the same person from *Jedi* without the trauma, I would be just another version of Obi-Wan, and we’ve already seen that. And since it’s not my story anymore, now it’s Rey’s story, I think you can be more flexible in terms of how the supporting characters like myself are handled.”

## COOL HAND LUKE

That, of course, is a big deal for someone who’s been synonymous with lightsabers and X-wings for 40 years. While Skywalker is Lucas’s creation and the intellectual property of the Walt Disney Company, Hamill is the man who realised him on screen, all the way from twin suns and “power converters”, to “I’m a Jedi knight, like my father before me”.

“You can’t help but feel a little ownership even though I didn’t create it,” he says. “Then you think, ‘These young punks think that they know Luke better than me!’ But this is the first generation of filmmakers who were fans, who were kids when the movies first came out, and now they’re reinterpreting them for a new generation. And at some point you have to realise they have to make the movie they want, they don’t have to make the movie *I* want.”

In the 34 years since *Return Of The Jedi* he must have had some ideas about where Luke might have ended up, though? →



"You would assume that after saving the galaxy the way he did he would become, like, a venerated member of the high Jedi order," he laughs, "sort of like a cardinal or a monseigneur, who knows, maybe the Pope of Jedi!"

"My son Nathan is the real *Star Wars* buff," Hamill adds, "and he told me years ago, 'Dad, there's this great story where they clone an evil Luke from your severed hand [Luke Skywalker in Timothy Zahn's 1993 novel, *The Last Command*].'" I said, 'Oh, baby, would I love that?' Not only could you get to play your evil twin, but what a great idea that you bring Luke back, and the audience starts noticing him undermining the heroes, cutting their fuel supply inexplicably, maybe even killing one of the supporting characters. It would be so mindboggling, and then of course the real Luke shows up and that mystery is solved. But there's too much Luke, and it's not my story anymore.

"When I suggested it to Rian, he said he thought that was a cool storyline too, but it's been done. Rian had to find a way to take elements of the movies that everyone expects to be there – the action, the adventure, the special effects, the creatures and humour – so that everyone feels they're having a *Star Wars* experience, but also bring something new to the table, that's challenging, that hasn't been done before. I think he's done it. This one doesn't feel like any of the others to me, aside from the elements I just spoke about. People say, 'Is it more like *Jedi*, is it more like *Empire*?' I dunno, it's sort of like its own thing."

## JOURNEY'S END

While Lucas's three *Star Wars* prequels were content to build a galaxy far, far away on computer monitors, the new breed of *Star Wars* movie has taken a more tactile approach. There's a real appetite for building spaceships, sets and creatures for real – and it had a profound impact on Hamill.

"I walked onto the Millennium Falcon set and I was just overwhelmed with emotion," he admits. "Everything was exactly the way it was – it even smelled the same way. When I sat in the cockpit it was like visiting a childhood home that you thought had been torn down. It just unlocked something in my brain. I got goosebumps. My family was with me and I said, 'Guys, I have to be alone here for a second.'"

The remote Irish island of Skellig Michael, the real-world location standing in for the aforementioned Ahch-To, had a similar effect on Hamill – but for very different reasons.

"I remember when I was out on the salt flats in North Africa making the first film," he says. "I turned my back on the crew, and I looked out on the horizon... I was transported.



Luke just wanted to eat his breakfast in peace.

I really felt like I was in a galaxy far, far away, because I had the robots and floating car, and I looked the way I did. I'd never been in a place like it. The salt flats are just 360 degrees of horizon, because nothing on earth can grow, so it's unearthly. I never had that experience again when we were in Norway for *Empire* – snow is snow, I'd seen that before – and as beautiful as the forest of Endor was, it was like the sequoias that I had visited as a child.

"And there was a moment on *Episode VII* when I was just waiting around, and I turned away from the crew – I didn't mean to recreate the moment! – and I was looking out, and it

looked unreal. I just got goosebumps again, like I was in Tunisia, where I suddenly felt like I wasn't on Earth. I'm not a Method actor where I really feel like I'm on another planet – but it was a remarkable feeling."

Hamill describes climbing to the top of Skellig Michael as "brutal". "When I first read the script I thought they'd do it on green screen," he laughs. "I live in Malibu so I thought I'd just go up the road to JJ's studios in Santa Monica. It'll be a 7am call, they'll probably get it in two shots, we'll be done by lunchtime. Then they said they wanted to go to a real location..."

"I said, 'How long are you allowing the crew to get up the hill,'" he continues. "They said, '45 minutes'. I said, 'Give me an hour and a half'. I had to stop every 100 steps because they're not normal steps – they're stone, and it's up and up and it just never ends. They had this big mountain climber guide behind me to catch me in case I stumbled and fell. If I fall off the cliff and die, the insurance will go crazy – let's face it, I'm an investment!" ●



*The Last Jedi* promises some sweet battle sequences.



“THIS  
DOESN’T  
FEEL LIKE  
ANY OTHER  
STAR WARS  
FILM”

## THERE IS ANOTHER SKYWALKER

THE DESTINY OF LUKE  
WE NEVER SAW  
ON SCREEN

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, there was a thing called the “Expanded Universe” (basically, a place where all our *Star Wars* pals got up to all sorts of new adventures, following the events of *Return Of The Jedi*). On 25 April 2014, millions of voices cried out and were suddenly silenced when Disney decided to scrap the entire EU, binning Luke, Leia, Han and Chewie’s post-*Jedi* lives as non-canon.

Still, they can’t wipe our minds like we’re droids or something – we remember exactly what happened to Luke Skywalker in the EU. Mainly because it’s sort of insane.

It all started sensibly enough. Luke celebrated his Death Star II victory by establishing the New Jedi Order on Yavin 4. Han and Leia’s twins, Jaina and Jacen Solo, eventually joined uncle Luke to train as Jedi apprentices. In a fairly massive coincidence, Luke met and fell in love with Palpatine’s former assassin (who ignored Palpatine’s final wish that she should kill Luke) Mara Jade, who Luke trains as a Jedi

(oh yeah, she’s also Force sensitive). They eventually get married and have a baby, which they name Ben, after Ben Kenobi.

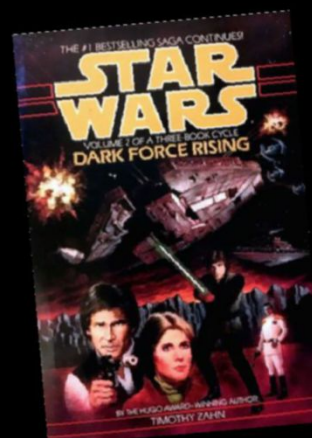
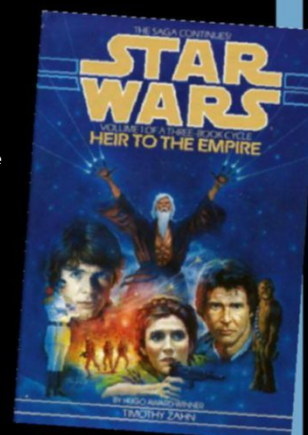
Unfortunately, this is where things start to get really nutty – the Emperor is resurrected via clones (don’t ask), and decides to have another go at tempting Luke to the dark side, which this time Luke ACCEPTS. But it turns out he’s trying to destroy the Sith from within, and he’s

eventually able to reject the dark side and destroy the Empire, yay!

Sadly, Luke’s nephew Jacen Solo turns to the dark side and kills Luke’s wife, Mara Jade. Luke defeats Jacen’s Sith Lord, Lumiya, and Jacen’s twin sister, Jaina, duels with (and kills!) Jacen.

The Jedi are outlawed, and Luke and Ben travel the galaxy as exiles, fighting Sith. Eventually, Luke passes away, becoming one with the Force...

Sam Ashurst



It’s an emotional moment when Rey gives Luke his lost ‘saber.

The amphibian Caretakers live on Ahch-To with Luke.





## USE THE FORCE

### HOW TO LIVE LIFE LIKE A JEDI

Ever wanted to twirl around a lightsaber? Or move rocks with your mind? Too bad – *Star Wars* is not real. The next best thing, however, is the Church of Jediism: a quasi-religious group whose philosophy is adapted from the fictional teachings of the Jedi. Its founder, Daniel M Jones, talks *SFX* through what it takes to become a real-life Jedi master.

#### OPEN YOUR MIND

The first step on the path of the Jedi, says Jones, is to, “have an open and curious mind. We encourage all new members starting on their path to read, think and learn new things every day. We teach our followers to be comfortable with not knowing all there is to know. A true Jedi approaches everyone and everything with an open mind and heart.”

#### UNDERSTAND THE FORCE

Forget Midichlorians. The real-life Force is, “one all-powerful energy Force that connects all living things together,” explains Jones. “Anything that inspires passion in you is the Force at work but the Force can have both a dark and a light side...”

#### CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS

Tempted by the Dark Side? You need to, “step outside of yourself. Use Jedi mind techniques to observe anger and hate, and understand that when these feelings strike they are temporary. You are separate from your emotions. You control your emotions. They do not control you. A master Jedi has mastered their emotions.”

#### DEFEND, NEVER ATTACK

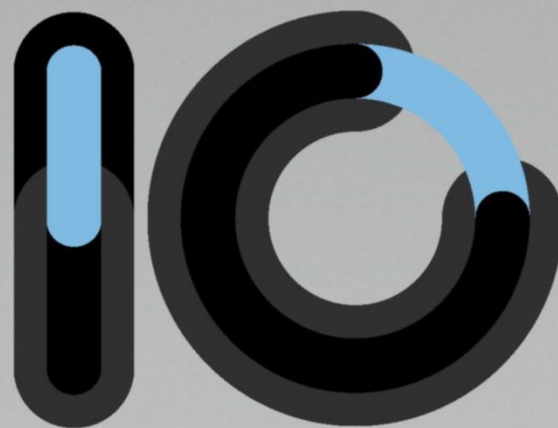
Jones' lightsaber skills are “exemplary,” apparently, but he advises that you, “always find a way to avoid conflict. If someone is aggressive, we teach our members to withdraw and not feed negative energy with energy. We teach our members to use their eloquence and humility to diffuse tense situations if possible.”

#### DON'T WORRY ABOUT THE JEDI CODE

Real-life Jedi are not as strict as fictional ones. For example, “We used to have a dress code for meetings – Jedi robes and lightsabers – but it is no longer compulsory.” And as for celibacy... “It is not something we typically recommend because meaningful sex with someone you love is a beautiful expression of the transcendent and electric power of the Force.”

Stephen Kelly

Become The Force by Daniel M Jones  
is out 16 November.



# ESSENTIAL JEDI FACTS

## TAKE YOUR FIRST STEP INTO A LARGER WORLD WITH OBI-SAM ASHURST

1

The word 'Jedi' is derived from the Japanese word “jidaigeki”, which translates as “period drama” (specifically samurai TV soap operas). George Lucas says he saw a jidaigeki episode in Japan around a year before *A New Hope* was made, and the word stayed with him.

2

Lucas's first treatment for *A New Hope* mentions Jedi in the opening sentence – albeit in a slightly different form. *Star Wars* was “...the story of Mace Windu, a revered Jedi-bendu of Opuchi who was related to Usby CJ Thape, a Padawaan learner to the famed Jedi...” Samuel L Jackson would eventually play Mace Windu in *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*, some 25 years after those words were first written.



3

In *Star Wars* lore, an order known as "Je'Daii" came before the modern Jedi. The Je'Daii studied and used both the light and dark sides of the Force equally.

4

The Jedi order was founded as a religious organisation, focused on studying, and worshipping the light side of the Force. The Jedi detached themselves from emotion, living as monks as they explored the galaxy - before settling on the ice planet Ilum, where they discovered the Kyber crystals that channel the Force to power their traditional weapon, the lightsaber.

6

The Jedi code runs as follows: "There is no emotion, there is peace. There is no ignorance, there is knowledge. There is no passion, there is serenity. There is no chaos, there is harmony. There is no death, there is the Force." The code also dictates that Jedi Knights and Jedi Masters must not take on more than one Padawan at a given time, and forbids Jedi from forming attachments, such as marriage, family and romantic love. Because all life is precious to the Jedi, they're also banned from killing unarmed opponents, and they're not allowed to seek revenge. Easy way to remember it? The Sith get to do all the fun stuff.

5

We learn in *Star Wars: The Clone Wars* that Jedi warriors go through a ritual known as "the gathering", which requires Jedi younglings to find a Kyber crystal most attuned to their Force presence. They then construct a lightsaber using their crystal, before being chosen as a Padawan learner by a Jedi master.

8

In 2001, 390,127 residents of England and Wales (almost 0.8% of the population) stated their religion as Jedi on their official Census forms, surpassing Sikhism, Judaism, and Buddhism, which meant it was the fourth-largest reported religion in the UK.

7

"The Lost Twenty" is a term given to a group of Jedi Masters (20 in total, obv's) who left the Jedi Order throughout its history. The first twelve left the Jedi Order to become "Dark Jedi" who founded the first Sith Empire.

10

The term "Grey Jedi" has two meanings. It's used by Jedi and Sith to describe Force users who are able to balance the light and dark sides of the Force without surrendering to the dark side. It also describes Jedi who operated outside the strictures of the Jedi Code. To be considered a true Grey Jedi you'd need to meet both qualifications. *Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic's* Jolee Bindo is one of the earliest examples of a canonical Grey Jedi, and many fans believe that Luke Skywalker will be confirmed as a Grey Jedi in *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*.

9

The first *A Hope* treatment was originally titled "The Journal of the Whills" - this term has been folded into canon, with "the Journal of the Whills" appearing in the novelisation of *The Force Awakens* (in *Rogue One*, Chirrut Imwe and Baze Malbus, protectors of the Temple of the Kyber, are described as guardians of the Whills). The journal is a mysterious diary that mentions the Jedi, in a verse labeled "7:477" that's about the dark and light side of the Force. It runs as follows: "First comes the day, then comes the night. After the darkness shines through the light. The difference, they say, is only made right by the resolving of grey through refined Jedi sight." Because the journal is part of modern canon, fans expect it to be explored in *The Last Jedi*.





# LET THERE BE

STAR WARS SET DECORATOR ROGER CHRISTIAN ON  
THE CREATION OF THE JEDI'S ICONIC WEAPON

**T**HE FORCE AWAKENS powerfully concluded with Rey attempting to hand an ageing Luke Skywalker his thought-to-be-lost lightsaber. Breaking with *Star Wars* tradition, *The Last Jedi* will continue precisely from this pivotal moment, bringing a potent symmetry to proceedings

40 years on from *A New Hope*, where Obi-Wan Kenobi famously presented that same saber to the young Luke.

"When I first read the script to *Star Wars* I knew the lightsaber could be iconic – that's why I took so much care finding something that looked like it was a real and functional weapon," says Roger Christian, who was tasked with turning George Lucas's vision and consequently production illustrator Ralph McQuarrie's concept painting of the 'saber into a silver screen reality.

Due to budgetary constraints, the Oscar-winning *Star Wars* set decorator built the original Jedi weapon for *A New Hope* from silver tubed objects he fortuitously retrieved in a dusty discarded cardboard box from a photographic shop in London's Great Marlborough Street, altering them into the iconic design we know today.

"I was scrambling around trying to find

something that would fit into this world and I found these three-cell flashgun handles which had a quality to them that was very hard to design," he tells *SFX*. "It had a red firing button and all of those things on it that looked functional. To make the handle more weapon-like I stuck seven carefully cut black rubber t-strips to length evenly around the handle. I then inserted a bubble strip of LED lights. This transformation just turned everything on its head. As soon as George saw it he smiled: it was the perfect weight and size and looked exactly how he had described."

While an astonishing invention for the cinema era, Lucas's vision for the lightsaber was greatly influenced by mythology and the legend of King Arthur. "Excalibur is right at the heart of it!" continues Christian.

"That sword has a mythology behind it and George passed that on to the Jedi. It's the power that gives [King Arthur] the ability to do what he had to do to rule, fight and succeed. It's also a sword within the ancient Samurai tradition of fighting; it's a more mythic weapon than a gun and that's the reason I believe the lightsaber took off in the collective imagination. When it

lit up that first time it just wowed audiences!"

After witnessing Rey's extraordinary lightsaber moves in the latest *Last Jedi* trailer, it looks like we're about to be wowed all over again, mirroring the destinies of several key *Star Wars* characters over the entire saga.

"Obi-Wan Kenobi taking it out of that trunk, presenting it as Luke's father's weapon and announcing that it's the weapon of a Jedi – that moment was hugely important in the first *Star Wars* film as it's a moment of destiny for Luke," considers Christian. "Now we're coming back to that kind of moment with the new films – where they've become all about this power and the Jedi weapon. The lightsaber has now become more than the icon of the film – it's become a major plot point!" **Oliver Pfeiffer**



## BLADE OF GLORY

### THE STORY OF LUKE'S LIGHTSABER



Anakin Skywalker builds his second lightsaber to replace the Sand People-slaughtering weapon that was destroyed in the droid foundries of Geonosis. (*The Clone Wars*)



Anakin uses the 'saber to execute Count Dooku while rescuing Supreme Chancellor Palpatine from the Separatists. It briefly falls into the possession of General Grievous. (*Revenge Of The Sith*)



Having turned to the Dark Side, Anakin/Darth Vader uses the weapon to slaughter dozens of Jedi without a second thought – even the Younglings! (*Revenge Of The Sith*)



Obi-Wan Kenobi takes the lightsaber after defeating Vader on Mustafar. He keeps it with him on Tatooine for the subsequent 19 years. (*Revenge Of The Sith*)



Obi-Wan gives the 'saber to a young Luke Skywalker, claiming that "your father wanted you to have this when you were old enough". You tease! (*A New Hope*)



# LIGHTSABER



Rey gets to grips with wielding a lightsaber.

## SABER RATTLING

ELEGANT RIP-OFFS FOR A MORE SHAMELESS AGE

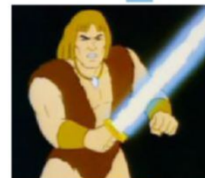
### STARCHASH

Future icon of irony David Hasselhoff wielded a suspiciously familiar weapon in this brazen Italian *Star Wars* knock-off from 1978. Did George Lucas steal his shonky droid opponent for *The Phantom Menace* as payback? No.



### THUNDARR THE BARBARIAN

Set in the post-apocalyptic America of 3994 AD, this Saturday morning 'toon armed its fur-clad hero with a "sunsword". It could cut through anything – yes, even the heart of Jacob Rees-Mogg – and repelled magic.



### MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM

As this early mecha anime proved, any insanely cool giant robot becomes exponentially cooler with the addition of a lightsaber. The blade uses superheated Minovsky particle plasma. Don't argue.



### HALO

The classic videogame includes an Energy Sword in its arsenal. Regarded as a sacred weapon by the Sangheili, this close-quarters plasma blade may only be used by nobility. Bloody toffs.



### JAY AND SILENT BOB STRIKE BACK

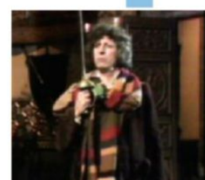
Inhale the Force! Slacker king Kevin Smith swings the Bong Saber against none other than Mark Hamill in this Gen X epic. Also comes in double-bong variant for the ultimate high.



### DOCTOR WHO

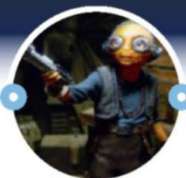
1978's "The Androids Of Tara" delivers some swashbuckling "electro-sword" action. Alas the perilous state of the budget ensured only the occasional flash of FX from these old-school rapiers.

[Nick Setchfield](#)



Vader chops off Luke's hand in a famous duel. It falls into the bowels of Bespin's Cloud City – taking the lightsaber with it.

(*The Empire Strikes Back*)



The lightsaber somehow falls into the possession of Maz Kanata, who keeps it until Rey finds it in the bowels of the castle on Takodana.

(*The Force Awakens*)



Rey uses the 'saber to defeat Kylo Ren, and subsequently takes it back to its former owner, Luke, by travelling to the planet of Ahch-To.

(*The Force Awakens*)

REX (1)



# "SHE'S REALLY GOOD AT WHAT SHE DOES"

KELLY MARIE  
TRAN IS  
ROSE TICO

## HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE ROSE?

She is smart, brave and loyal, someone who knows she comes from a humble beginning – she's not a princess, she's not a superhero. She's in the Resistance, and she is aware of things that are happening, but she's always been someone who's worked behind pipes, fixing things. She's never been someone who's been at the forefront of the action, but in this movie she gets pulled into it.

## HER OLDER SISTER PAIGE IS A RESISTANCE GUNNER. IS ROSE JEALOUS THAT SHE DOESN'T SEE THE ACTION?

It's more admiration. I think there's always that need to want to be as cool as your older sister, so of course she looks up to her. But I don't think that there's jealousy in terms of wanting to be at the forefront. Rose is really good at what she does, and it might not be as glorious a job, but I think she symbolises that there are always so many background players in any revolution, and without those people you can't have those people at the forefront. If their ships aren't working, they can't be fighting the First Order.

Rose and Finn were less than impressed with the Porg mating ritual.

With Rey on Ahch-To, Rose becomes Finn's new partner.

## ROSE SPENDS A LOT OF THE MOVIE WITH FINN. WHAT'S HER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM LIKE?

When Rose first meets Finn, Finn is already a hero of the Resistance, so she's heard about all his adventures from *The Force Awakens*, and when she first meets him she's kind of a fangirl about it. But as the film goes on you get to see what it means to meet a hero, and actually realise who they are. Their relationship sort of morphs throughout the movie that way.

## THE FILM HASN'T COME OUT YET BUT YOU'VE ALREADY BEEN

## IMMORTALISED AS AN ACTION FIGURE. HOW DO YOU GET YOUR HEAD AROUND THE FACT MILLIONS OF PEOPLE ARE ABOUT TO RECOGNISE YOU?

I try not to think about it, because it's so overwhelming [laughs]! There was definitely this part of me thinking about how do I deal with this life change, and then I started to realise that I am just going to go on in my life the way that I have been, and just take everything day to day. I'll let you know how it goes. I'm still trying to figure it out!

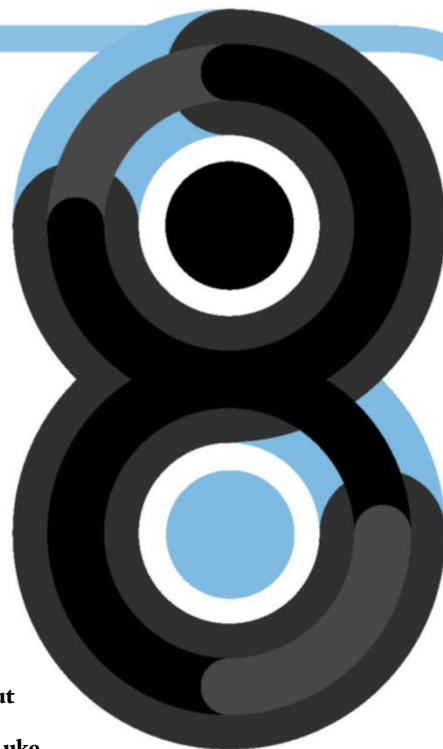
Richard Edwards





# SUPER

## ALL THE KEY NEED-TO-KNOW INFO FOR THE LAST JEDI



• *The Last Jedi* picks up exactly where *The Force Awakens* left off, with Rey and Luke on Ahch-To.

• Other residents of Ahch-To include the puffin-like Porgs, and the Caretakers – a race of female nun-like creatures who “tolerate” Luke’s presence.

• Other planets confirmed to appear in the movie are the new worlds of Cantonica and Crait.

• **Cantonica is home to Canto Bight, a Las Vegas-ish casino city that writer/director Rian**

**Johnson describes as**

**“a playground for rich assholes”.**

• Crait is a remote, uninhabited (aside from crystalline fox-like creatures) world that was home to a Rebel outpost during the time of the Empire. In *The Last Jedi*, the Resistance will have a base there. (It’s the world with the red dust you’ve seen in the trailers, where the Resistance will face off against the First Order’s AT-ATs

and their bigger, gorilla like cousins the AT-M6s.)

• **Rian Johnson says of the scenes between Rey and Luke, “There’s a training element to it, but not exactly what you’d expect.”**

**(This seems to tally with Luke’s comments in the new trailer about being scared of someone’s power – but is he talking about Rey or Kylo Ren?)**

• Finn, critically injured in *The Force Awakens*, starts the movie in a healing bacta suit.

• **Poe Dameron has a new souped up X-wing fighter with an extra booster.**

• There’s a scene where Leia slaps Poe.

• **We’ll see Supreme Leader Snoke in the flesh, presumably completing Kylo Ren’s training. (He sees Han and Leia’s lad as the perfect balance between light and dark sides of the Force.)**

• Snoke’s protected by an elite team of Praetorian Guards.

• **Johnson says “we’ll learn exactly as much about Snoke as we need to,” pointing out that, “we**

**didn’t know**

**anything about the Emperor except what Luke knew about him.”**

• Captain Phasma will return with a much more significant role, having escaped Starkiller Base – since we last saw her, she’s witnessed Kylo Ren’s duel with Rey, and hunted down an Imperial officer who knows she aided Han Solo, Finn

Sure, pick a fight with Phasma. What could go wrong?



and Chewbacca on Starkiller Base. It’s also been confirmed that, under the helmet, she’s a human female.

• **Major new characters include Resistance technician Rose Tico (Kelly Marie Tran – see opposite), and purple-haired Resistance bigwig Vice-Admiral Amilyn Holdo (Laura Dern).**

• The third significant newbie is Benicio Del Toro’s DJ, a morally flexible character of no obvious allegiance who helps Finn and Rose during their mission to Canto Bight. He’s a “slicer” (computer hacker) who Finn actor John Boyega describes as the “best codebreaker in the galaxy”.

• **There’s a new, black-liveried BB droid known as BB-9E – the anti-BB-8.**

Richard Edwards

Kylo Ren was feeling intense helmet envy.





# FORCE FOR THOUGHT

PRODUCER RAM BERGMAN TELLS RICHARD EDWARDS HOW THE LAST JEDI IS PUSHING THE BOUNDARIES OF A STAR WARS MOVIE



**U**SUALLY WHEN *SFX* speaks to a filmmaker a couple of months ahead of their blockbuster's release, they're hectically running around fiddling with scores, signing off the colour grading, or making a last dash to finalise effects shots. So it's something of a

surprise when *The Last Jedi* producer Ram Bergman tells *SFX*, "We finished the movie, there's just clean-ups here and there, working on the DVD, press, things like that. But the film's basically done."

We're going to take that as a big positive ahead of *Episode VIII*'s arrival – along with the fact that all of the behind-the-scenes buzz around the project has been, well, good. We're the first to admit that big studios aren't generally in the habit of spreading anything but messages of harmony and love ahead of their blockbusters landing in cinemas, but the rebooted *Star Wars* galaxy has had to deal with more than its fair share of backstage shenanigans since Disney bought the keys to the Millennium Falcon back in 2012. Indeed, from all the (not officially confirmed) rumours about Gareth Edwards's diminished role on *Rogue One* to full-on director swaps on *Episode IX* and Han's solo movie *Solo*, it's only JJ Abrams on *The Force Awakens* and now *The Last Jedi* writer/director Rian Johnson who've made it to the end in one piece.

"Rian wrote the script and people really loved it," Bergman recalls. "That was as simple as I can say. When Rian was hired, JJ was essentially just a month into filming, so there

were not really any guidelines for us – we just had the script that JJ was filming and dailies of what they were doing. Then at some point in the writing process, we basically told the studio where it's going to go and everybody seemed to be on board. It was the month after JJ finished filming the movie when we delivered the script, and Kathy [Kennedy, Lucasfilm head] and the studio loved it. The first draft is probably 90% of the movie that we ended up shooting a year later."

For anyone looking into that galaxy far, far away, that seems like a wise strategy. With high-school noir *Brick* and tricky time-travel thriller *Looper* – two of the most memorable films of the 21st century – Johnson proved himself to be a quirky, idiosyncratic auteur with a great ear for snappy dialogue. Why hire such an exciting talent – albeit one who has no previous experience of a mega-budget blockbuster – and ask him to churn out AN Other studio sequel, unless you're desperate to play safe? But was there ever a danger that Johnson might have pushed the story too far?

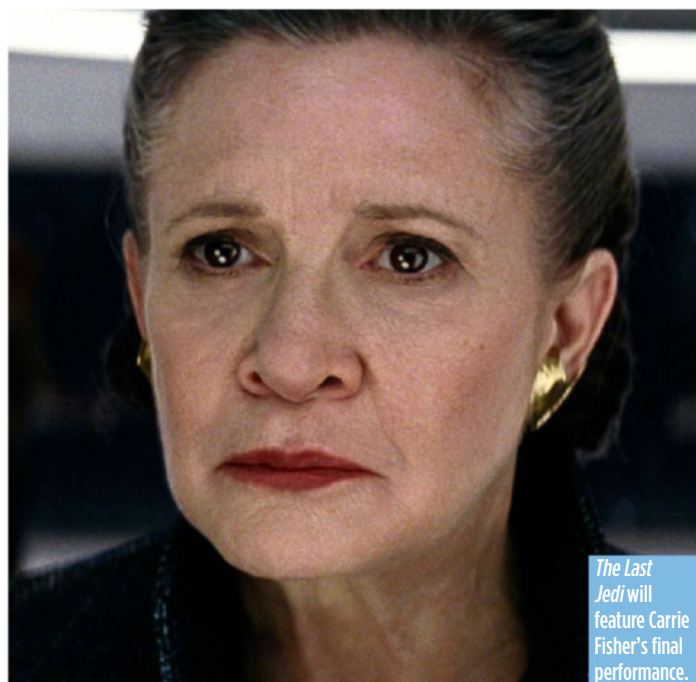
"There were some things where you say, 'Oh shit, they're never going to let us do this!' but







We're so happy the new film is going to have mo' Dameron.



The Last Jedi will feature Carrie Fisher's final performance.



Rian Johnson and Chewie contemplate an arm wrestle.

"THE MOVIE  
WON'T BE  
WHAT YOU  
EXPECT –  
THAT'S THE  
BEAUTY OF IT"

they totally did, and I think everybody realised that it's probably what it needed," says Bergman. "And everybody was like, 'Don't be safe.' To the credit of Kathy, and Bob Iger and Alan Horn [Disney CEO and chairman, respectively] and all those guys, they never tried to push us towards the safe. Whatever we pitched, whatever Rian said he wanted to do, they completely supported, and I think they understood why it needed to be that way. So definitely, Rian had the vision, but you have to give credit to the people on top; they had the vision to actually say yes, we need to shake it up a bit."

Of course, that screwing with a formula includes Johnson's much publicised approach to Luke Skywalker, which famously prompted star Mark Hamill to tell his director, "I pretty much fundamentally disagree with every choice you've made for this character."

"I think when you watch the movie, you think this is not where I thought it was going to go," Bergman tells *SFX*. "That's the beauty of it. I cannot get into the details, but the script that Rian wrote was really taking it in a direction you never really expected, and which kind of made it exciting for everyone who was involved in the movie. But of course in the beginning it was hard for Mark, especially coming from *Episode VII* [where he barely appeared], which also was a bit hard for him."

## STAR LORE

While every previous *Star Wars* episode has been preceded by an in-universe gap of at least a year (anything from the 12 months or so between *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return Of The Jedi*, to the three decades separating *Jedi* and *The Force Awakens*), *The Last Jedi* breaks with tradition by picking up exactly where its predecessor left off. It's a move Bergman reckons was something of a no-brainer. →





So evil, yet so stylish. We'll see more of General Hux.

"There wasn't any deliberation," he says. "Immediately when you saw the end of *The Force Awakens*, with the cliffhanger, you knew you wanted to know what happens right after that moment. It wasn't even a question."

That decision, however, adds to a tricky dilemma – how do you explain away 30-plus years of backstory, without playing around with *Star Wars* storytelling convention by adding numerous flashbacks? (The closest the saga has ever come is Rey's vision in *Episode VII*, and that was effectively a cheat because it was driven by the Force.)

It's certainly information that can't be brushed under the carpet. For starters, we need to know the identity of Rey's parents; how Supreme Leader Snoke came to run the First Order; what made the former Ben Solo hook up with the Knights of Ren; and how Maz Kanata got her hands on the lightsaber Luke lost at Bespin. It would also be handy to learn why gigantic evil organisations with galactic domination on their minds keep on building colossal battle stations with easily identifiable fatal flaws.

"You definitely think about [how to supply that information]," admits Bergman. "Again, I can't tell you how, but I think when people see the movie they'll basically understand to a large degree what happened in between. But not everything is going to be answered..."

## REY OF LIGHT

Perhaps the other biggest mission for *The Last Jedi* to negotiate is the sheer volume of core characters – the biggest principal cast in *Star Wars* movie history. Okay, the late Han Solo's no longer a concern – or is he? We don't know yet if Harrison Ford's been tempted to return for a back-from-the-dead Corellian cameo – but *Episode VIII* not only has to service original stars Luke, Leia, Chewbacca, R2-D2 and C-3PO, and *The Force Awakens* stars Rey, Finn, Poe Dameron, Kylo Ren and BB-8, but also newcomers Rose Tico, DJ and Vice-Admiral

Amilyn Holdo. And there will probably be more we don't know about yet.

"It's definitely a challenge, because this movie does have more characters than previous movies," says Bergman. "But at the end of the day you kind of figure out who are the main characters carrying the main story, and you make sure you give arcs to tell the story of other characters. You don't have 10 hours in a movie, you only have a limited amount of time, so how you tell the story of all those characters is the tricky part. I think Rian delivered."

And then there's the bantha in the room, the small matter of a previous second instalment in a *Star Wars* trilogy that's frequently held up among the best part twos of all time – and no, we're not talking about *Attack Of The Clones*. *The Empire Strikes Back* got so much right that it must be tempting to just use that as your

template and be done with it – much as *The Force Awakens* riffed heavily on *A New Hope*.

"You look at it, and you look at all the movies, but by the same token you put it aside and you say let's do what's right for this movie," Bergman counters. "Let's forget about the expectation, let's do what's right for the structure of this movie. You stop looking at the other movies as a reference. You tell the story of this movie as it is. Are there things that would be similar? For sure, but by the same token, it's not. You're not consciously saying you're making something different or similar – you're just trying to tell the best story in the best way." Hopefully the Force really is strong with this one. ●

*Star Wars: The Last Jedi* is in cinemas from 14 December.

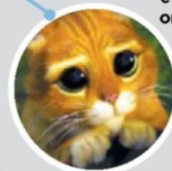
## THE PORC COLLECTIVE

WHY THIS NEW STAR WARS CRITTER IS THE ULTIMATE IN GENETICALLY ENGINEERED ADORABILITY

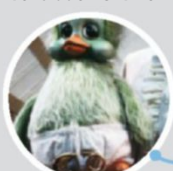
**MOUTH**  
The frowny kisser of chortling sadface Nien Nunb.



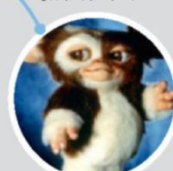
**EYES**  
The black, ever-so-needy orbs of Puss in Boots.



**ARMS**  
The helpless fluffy stumps of irksome vent-duck Orville.



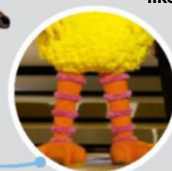
**COLOURING**  
Is that a spaniel-like hint of Gizmo in the two-tone fur?



**BELLY**  
Who could resist tickling this soft, Totoro-ish expanse?



**FEET**  
Big Bird would like his pins back, please.





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Charlie Brooker's  
**BLACK MIRROR**  
is warping into  
space for its fourth  
season. Ian Berriman  
beamed onto  
the set

# MIRROR



A photograph of three actors in futuristic uniforms standing on a spaceship bridge set. The actor on the left is a man in a teal uniform. The actor in the center is a woman in a teal two-piece outfit and tall boots. The actor on the right is a man in a yellow uniform. They are standing in front of a large, futuristic control panel with many buttons and screens. The word "UNIVERSE" is overlaid in large white letters across the middle of the image.

# UNIVERSE

**B**OOM, LEFT!" A VOICE shouts, prompting a mass lurch to port. "Boom, right!" sends everyone staggering starboard as sparks fly and the lighting flickers.

Reassuringly, some things never change in the world of sci-fi TV. Who needs sets mounted on hydraulics when you can get the cast to do their best reacting-to-explosions acting?

*SFX* is at Twickenham Studios, observing filming of an episode of *Black Mirror* – but feeling rather like a fly on the wall at Desilu Studios in 1966 during the making of *Star Trek*. Before us is a spaceship bridge, bedecked with banks of blinking lights. Standing about it are six actors in brightly coloured uniforms. This is ➔



is the USS Callister, captained by the heroic Captain Daly (*Breaking Bad*'s Jesse Plemons) – who's currently engaged in a stand-off with a heavily-armed Gorgon Dreadnought.

"We're not running anywhere," he says, pointing at a green screen. "Take us into the gas cluster!"

"It's suicide, Captain!" protests the First Officer. "It'll tear the ship apart!"

"You're a Space Fleet officer," Daly snaps. "Hold yourself together!"

"Boom, left!" comes the cry from behind the cameras – followed by a volley of "Pew! Pew! Pew!" noises as the Callister returns fire.

Sitting alongside us behind the monitors, Charlie Brooker, creator of the anthology show, whispers that the look of this sequence will be very '60s.

"It's all wonky angles and harsh lighting – lights just on people's eyes, beads of sweat, all that stuff."

Daly's daring tactics eventually win the day, and he sends his alien adversary off with his tail between his legs, nobly declaring, "I showed you mercy – reflect on that."

A cry of "Three cheers for Captain Daly!" goes up. After a chorus of "For he's a jolly good fellow", the hero worship starts to look a little OTT, as the First Officer drops to one knee to kiss his hand, and Daly swings a female crewmember into a clinch.

"Cut!" calls director Toby Haynes, and the cast dissolves into laughter. They're clearly having a whale of a time.

Brooker tells us he came up with the concept for "USS Callister" on the set of season three's "Playtest".

"We're a sci-fi series and we haven't done space yet!" was the thought. "So let's do space."

Not being all that au fait with deep-space shows ("I can't relate to a cone-headed alien in white robes explaining why humankind has violence in its system," he jokes), Brooker enlisted the aid of Will Bridges (co-writer of last year's "Shut Up And Dance"), who brought his nerd knowledge to bear on the script.

"We thought of him because we knew he's a sci-fi fan," Brooker explains. "He was fucking delighted! He kept referencing things where I was like, 'I don't know what that is!'"

With Bridges supplying technobabble, further authenticity has been added by having star Plemons work with a dialect coach.

"We had some discussions about degrees of Shatner," Brooker laughs. "Obviously it's not a carbon copy of William Shatner, but he's doing a really good job of emulating those strange stop/start speech patterns."

This being *Black Mirror*, there's much more to this episode than mere *Galaxy Quest*-style homage, though (all will be explained about 15 minutes in). Indeed, when Brooker first conceived the episode, it didn't include the '60s stylings – that came in later.



All aboard the USS Callister for the series' first space-set episode.

## “He’s doing a good job of emulating William Shatner’s speech patterns”

"The idea came from the notion of living under a dictatorship," Brooker explains. "So it's more about that dynamic than nods and winks to classic *Star Trek*. And if there's any parody going on, it's done with affection. My aim is not to have a pop at shows that are much more long-running and influential than ours!"

### BOLDLY GLOWING

During a break we catch up with the actors, who are bathed in a red glow – not because the captain has declared Red Alert, but because on a freezing soundstage in January, the sensible place to be is around an electric heater. Female cast members like Cristin Milioti – who plays Nanette, a new addition to the crew – have it worst thanks to uniforms that expose expanses of goose-pimpling midriff and thigh. One alien crewmember is bright blue, and Milioti is in danger of turning a similar shade.

"I know!" she says, "It's very cold, and it's not the most comfortable outfit. But it's so much fun once you see yourself in the mirror with the big hair and the lashes."

This must be what it was like working on a '60s sci-fi show, we suggest.

"I'm sure – though with, like, 95% less sexism," she wryly notes. "No one has slapped

us on the ass at lunch, which I'm sure is what that was like... But yeah, it's one of the most fun jobs I've ever had. In between takes, all of us are beaming, because it's what you dream about doing when you're a kid. It doesn't feel like work."

We put it to Plemons that "doing a Shatner" must be particularly good fun.

"There can only be one William Shatner!" Plemons insists. "But I'm trying to do my version. It's been an intense lesson for me in *Star Trek*, because I never grew up with sci-fi – I grew up in Texas, watching Westerns. But it's a lot of fun to have all this footage to go through. Someone told me that Shatner was classically trained and did a lot of theatre, and watching the episodes with that in mind, you do get the sense that he treated *Star Trek* as if it were Shakespeare."

Time for a nose around the bridge, doing our best to tune out the electric heaters and hot water bottle (a method Milioti's been using to fend off hypothermia). Noticing that iPads have been inset into the consoles, we peer at the labels on them. Some are suitably futuristic, like "HYPERVISOR VIRTUALISATION"; some not so much – why would the USS Callister need "VPN ENCRYPTION"? Intriguingly, the walls feature soft panels, like a





padded cell – a sensible precaution in case you're hurled against a bulkhead mid-battle? But the neatest feature is a revolving bar. Its shelves are lined with cocktail shakers, swizzle sticks and decanters of brightly coloured liquids, which include "distilled root blood" and "Bengarian phlegm shots". It's a good job it's there, because these characters are going to be in regular need of a stiff drink...

## MIRROR, MIRROR

Clocking in at 74 minutes, "USS Callister" is just one of six episodes of season four, which vary wildly in tone.

"We've got ones that are overtly comic," Brooker says. "And ones that are incredibly bleak and brutal."

We're actually getting eight stories, mind, as "Black Museum" is an anthology that uses the



## NEVER MIND THE BALOK

Charlie Brooker's *Trek* trauma

**T**hough Charlie Brooker isn't a Trekkie, he did enjoy watching the original series as a child – and has one particularly strong memory.

"I was terrified of the scary face from 'The Corbomite Maneuver!'" Brooker enthuses. "You know, the alien that's actually Clint Howard."

He's talking, of course, about the baleful visage of Balok, seen when Kirk communicates with an alien vessel, which turns out to be just a creepy dummy.

"That face used to come up in the end titles," Brooker remembers. "And it was an image that terrified me. I knew the scary face was going to appear, and there's something pleasurable about that when you're a kid – you know you're gonna be freaked out, but you deliberately put yourself through it. So every time *Star Trek* was on and that end music was playing, I was daring myself to continue looking at the screen. Then some weeks it *wasn't* that. It was just an alien women with green skin – that was disappointing, when you didn't get the scary face that you didn't want to see! Anyway... why did I bring all that up?"

We'll be sending Charlie an invoice for the therapy...

"Metalhead" is the first *Black Mirror* episode to be shot in black-and-white.



titular crime museum as a framing device for three tales.

"It's a bit *Amicus* horror movie," Brooker says, "A bit campfire tale. And it's got quite a lot of nods and winks to previous stories – we've gone very Easter egg-y on it."

The shortest episode of the season – and the series so far – is "Metalhead", starring Maxine Peake. It's also, at the suggestion of director David Slade (*30 Days Of Night*), the first monochrome *Black Mirror* episode.

"He said, 'I want to make it in black-and-white,'" Brooker explains, "and we thought, 'Yes, that's a good fit,' because of the nature of the story – it's deliberately pared back."

Then there's "Hang The DJ". Does the Smiths-lyric title have any significance?

"Probably not in the way you might think," Brooker says. "They don't literally grab a noose and hang a DJ! That's to do with romantic lives."

Brooker also confirms that "Crocodile" does *not* feature an actual crocodile. A "nightmarish thriller" starring Andrea Riseborough, it was shot in Iceland by *The Road*'s John Hillcoat.

"That's one of our logical traps," Brooker says. "A shocking thing happens at the opening, then it's all about the ramifications of that. There's a darkly comic element to it, but overall it's sweaty and tense."

Finally, the story that's most personal to Brooker is "Arkangel". Directed by Jodie Foster, this intimate tale of a mother/daughter relationship has a kitchen-sink feel.

"That's very much informed by my experience as a parent," Brooker says. "You can buy an app now that tracks a child's whereabouts, and there's nurseries that have webcams so people can check in and watch their kid. The instinct is a noble one. But at what point are you like the security services?"

In classic *Black Mirror* style, the episode features tech it's not difficult to imagine people being happy to use in the near-future.

"You see this daughter being fitted with an implant that allows her mother to see where she is at all times, to see medical information, to see what she's seeing... And also to potentially intervene in what she's seeing."

Talking about the parental instinct to protect takes Brooker back to something that happened when one of his sons was three.

"I was being a bad parent, he was watching stuff on YouTube, on the app. Then the algorithm goes, and it plays the next thing, and the next thing... I went out of the room, I came back, and he was watching the trailer for John Carpenter's *The Thing*! He was *not* happy!"

Fans of the likes of "White Bear" and "Shut Up And Dance" will be hoping some of season four proves to be just as traumatising... ●

*Black Mirror* season four starts airing on Netflix later in the year.



## MARY WISEMAN

Meet the newcomer behind *Star Trek: Discovery*'s excitable cadet

Words by Ian Berriman // Photography by Jay L Clendenin

One thing we're appreciating about the latest iteration of *Star Trek* is that the characters aren't all super-capable stuffed shirts, but people with human frailties and foibles. Take Sylvia Tilly, a cadet serving on her first deep-space mission, whose endearing nervousness and breathless babbling are providing an audience identification figure. As *Discovery* producer Ted Sullivan told *SFX*, "For me, who grew up dressing like Sulu and going to cons, she represents the viewer who wants to be in the show." We rather fear Tilly's optimism may be crushed by war. But early on, she's added some lighter notes in the midst of *Discovery*'s darkness.

It's a breakthrough role for Mary Wiseman, who was performing in off-Broadway theatre before she snagged the part. In the flesh, Wiseman's not quite as wet-behind-the-ears as Tilly, but does prove every bit as charming. A blizzard of red curls and giggles, she's still pinching herself that she's part of this universe – and clearly loving every minute of it.

### What's been your approach to playing Tilly?

Well, she's in her fourth year at Starfleet Academy, and I like to think she's on *Discovery* as an unpaid intern – like, that's her internship for the final credit. But this is the best internship she could ever get. Her dream is to rise in the ranks of Starfleet, so she's exactly where she wants to be.

### How much did you know about your character arc when you got the part?

Nothing – I didn't know if I was an alien or not until I got here! The script they gave us to audition self-destructed after 48 hours, so I felt like Inspector Gadget!

### Wait... the script self-destructed?!

Digitally! It sounds like my iPad exploded, but it's not that cool. It just all went away. I tried to take a screenshot and it self-destructed. But based on the script that I read, I knew this character was gonna be right in the sweet spot.

### This is your first time as a regular in a TV series. Does that mean you can really relate to Tilly, as the newbie in an experienced crew?

Yeah! It's very easy for me to do it. When we had a readthrough of my first episode I was shaking with nerves to do a readthrough with all these people I'd seen in so

many different things. For Tilly it was perfect, because she was so nervous to meet Michael [Burnham] and start working on the ship. I know exactly how she feels all the time, because I'm going through it! I'm learning things every day, and I quietly ask people questions all the time.

### Were you a *Star Trek* fan before you got the part?

I grew up watching a bit of *The Next Generation* with my uncle, but my boyfriend and his parents are hardcore dress-up, go-to-conventions Trekkies. When I got this job, my boyfriend's mom cried! I took a little video of Jonathan Frakes [Commander Riker in *The Next Generation*; now a director on *Discovery*] for her and I did not play it cool. I was like, "Argghh, hello!" and then forced him to take a video with me!

### Does the fact that they're fans change the way you view the series?

It put me in touch with how important this is to people. I kinda watched *Star Trek* as a kid, but rewatching it in preparation I saw so much more in it than I was able to when I was younger, because I have these people who it means a lot to. It gives me a sense of responsibility for the kind of story that I'm part of bringing forward.

### What do you think it is about *Star Trek* that people respond to so strongly?

Well, my boyfriend's mom told my mom that everything she could ever want to teach her son was in *Star Trek*; that there are lessons about life and how you treat people, and how a big group of people treats a big group of other people. And watching episodes, I see that. I think we do it a little differently, but I notice things like that all the time – little lessons about how to move through the world.

### When did it really hit you that you were starring in *Star Trek*, and all that that meant?

On my third or fourth day we had to run through a hallway really fast. I read the script and it was, "They run through a hallway." Then we did it and it was *six hours* of sprinting! I've never been a fast runner, and Sonequa [Martin-Green] kept going, "Do you need us to go faster? I could go faster." I was like, "No, please god, don't go faster!" I don't think I could walk the next day! That's when I was like, "Oh my God... I'm in an action show! This is cool stuff! I get to hold a phaser, run through a hallway, switch it to kill!" I never imagined it for myself. I'm just totally overwhelmed and delighted. ●

*Star Trek: Discovery* is on Netflix in the UK.

### Biodata

#### Occupation

→ Actor

#### From

→ Gaithersburg, Maryland

#### Greatest hits

→ Wiseman has appeared in TV shows like *Longmire* and *Baskets*, but this is her break-out role

#### Random fact

→ Wiseman's Christmas tree has been covered with *Trek* ornaments her whole life, because of her Trekkie uncle. This year they're going to add the USS *Discovery*!



“I GET TO  
HOLD A  
PHASER  
AND SET  
IT TO  
KILL!”



# RAISE

Strap yourselves in. **AGENTS OF SHIELD** is heading to the stars in its fifth season. Tara Bennett escapes Earth's gravity with the showrunners

**S**PACE... THE FINAL FRONTIER. THESE ARE THE voyages of Agent Phil Coulson.

Wait, what?

No, we aren't mixing up our sci-fi dramas. The fourth season finale of *Agents of SHIELD* tipped us the unexpected cosmic locale for this year's run of adventures, after all. Remember that oh-so-tantalising episode tag after Coulson and company got rounded up by a mysterious group who seem to have assigned Phil to work on a space station?

Coulson's intrepid but beleaguered agents spent season four locking horns with government types out to rid the world of Inhumans (including Daisy Johnson), ferreting out Life Model Decoys and even working alongside occult comic book icon Ghost Rider. Now the inky black void awaits the team, and executive producers/showrunners Jed Whedon and Maurissa Tancher are giddy about showing viewers what the new environment will bring out of their ensemble. →







"This is a new journey that we are taking the audience on right alongside with our characters," Tancharoen tells *SFX* about the season opener, which picks up right from the tag. "There's some fun to be had in the discovery happening simultaneously, for both our characters and the audience. It's a new version of things that we've never done before on the show."

Whedon continues, "We blew up our base, and we blew up the public perception of SHIELD, especially of Daisy, at the end of the season. They are going to have to find a new place to hide. Trying to avoid capture from those who are against them is part of it. That threat is still real and unresolved. We have a lot of threads left hanging about the people who wanted our people dead, but also wanted them destroyed, and have succeeded at that. What is the fallout of that? The team went into that diner at the end of 'World's End' assuming they would all go to jail. Whether or not that's true, we'll see, but they're still being hunted. It will make the job of constantly saving the world, as they do, a lot harder."

"We're in our fifth year with these people and our audience knows them well. Now it's just about putting them in stickier situations, and seeing where we can go that feels new, and causes them to have emotional reactions."

## SPACE TRAVEL

And while space may seem a reach, Whedon says there's solid logic in getting there. "We like the fact that our tagline when we started was 'Not all heroes are super' and we expanded from that," he says. "We started with a very grounded scene with people with no powers. In year two, we let Daisy become an Inhuman. And so we slowly expanded from a team of humans to super-humans, but who were still grounded in the world of science. Last year, with the release of *Doctor Strange*, we could expand into the world of magic and strange phenomena, and that allowed us to bring in Ghost Rider which was following in the footsteps of the cinematic universe. This year with *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol 2* coming out and the expansion of that universe, we felt like 'Why not go to space?'"

The setting also opens the door for the return of the Kree, who originally engineered the Inhumans and whose blood revived a very dead post-*Avengers* Coulson. They'll be just one of the antagonists the team tangle with this year. "We will have some new villains that you will recognise from the comics, and we'll have some old familiar faces that you'll be happy to see return," Whedon teases. "Our antagonists have gotten more and more complicated over the years. Obviously, Hydra is a clear bad guy, and easy to fight. But what we're facing now is



Never doubt the power of the moustache.



## “Daisy is no longer doubting her place in the world”

this push and pull about the perception of Inhumans, and what it is to be different, which is topical," he says with a smile.

"It seems like SHIELD is always fighting for every person's right to live with happiness and dignity. Yet there are persons against that, and they are coming from within and from people they trust and it's becoming much more of a grey area because the people who are fighting Inhumans believe they are trying to save humanity. They're not in it for the wrong reasons. If someone really believes they are doing good, that's a much more grey area because if they believe in that, you have to find a way to save both humanity and Inhumanity. I think our antagonists couldn't be more complicated to date, but they become even more personal."

For fans who loved the Ghost Rider arc in season four, fear not. As it turns out portal jumps or space locales aren't exactly deterrents to a spirit of vengeance. "We're happy that he exists in our world," Whedon enthuses. "I think it's safe to say we haven't seen the last of him. We're not going to be telling Ghost Rider stories right away but that doesn't mean he's not in the mix. Last we saw him, he walked into a portal into another dimension so at any point he could walk out of one."

In the meantime, Whedon and Tancharoen are eager for audiences to invest in Daisy/Quake's evolution after her heroic choices in the season four finale. The pair acknowledge the moment where she stepped up to assuage Fitz's guilt was a turning point for her. "After a year where she started out not wanting to be anywhere near [SHIELD], and pretty sure that everyone around her gets hurt, she ends the season having to go in the Framework with only one friend, having to pull everyone out and in the end saying, 'No, we're a team.' She's no longer doubting her place in the world and is accepting her role, a little bit, as a leader."

"It's very clear over the course of four seasons that Coulson sees her as someone with the potential to be a leader and he's been grooming her to be that this whole time," adds Tancharoen. "She stepped up to the plate at the end of last season, and we will continue along that path this season. And perhaps the why of it all is something we will address this year."

The middle of season five will also see *Agents Of SHIELD* reach its 100th episode, a milestone for any show that manages to make it to that number alive. The showrunners are tight-lipped on the episode's specifics, but Tancharoen does share that "the goal will be the recognition of our own mythology we've



Star Trek: Discovery had better watch out.



developed over the past five seasons. When we first started, people were hoping, or expecting us, it to be something that was directly tied to the [Marvel Studios] movies. I feel like over the course of the years, we've solidly created our own world, with our own characters that have merit. If anything, the story for our 100th will definitely be a way of celebrating that."

Where the story goes after that is also a mystery as the show's renewal each year has been far from a given for the production team. Five years is a great run for any series, but the duo says they haven't designed this year's arc with closure in mind. "Our approach to every season is we are aware there is a possibility we will have to tie it up," Tanchaoren says frankly. "It's always a mystery to us until we get that phone call that says we're picked up. Going into our fifth season, we are fully aware that we are in a very fortunate situation that not many shows make it this far, especially these days."

Whedon adds, "I think you can tell from the last season, we were definitely shooting for a season five as we left some serious cliffhangers. We're always ready to tell more. It's a lot of story to keep interesting but now we feel like we have a lot of great stuff in mind and are so excited about this season. I think we'll approach the end cautiously optimistic. What we don't want to do is have the series end without it being satisfying. So we'll try to build it two ways. If it feels like it's the end, we'll make a satisfying end, but we'll keep going until they tell us to stop." Tanchaoren laughs, "Yes, until they throw us out of our offices!" ●

*Agents Of SHIELD is on ABC in the US from 1 December, and E4 in the UK, date TBC.*



Chloe Bennet and Clark Gregg are all smiles.

## SKYE WALKING

**Chloe Bennet** is Daisy Johnson

### How does it feel to be almost at the 100th episode?

We're at the point where I get really nostalgic. This has been such an incredible growing experience for me, on and off, camera. I was 21 when I started the show and I'm 25 now. It's been some game-changing years. From Skye to Daisy to "Goth" Daisy to "Bangs" Daisy to the one coming up - there's even more names, so get ready for that - it's felt weirdly organic.

### What's been your greatest challenge on the show?

The hardest thing of all is anytime I actually have to drive a car, or a Vespa. I can ride on top of a car, fall off a car, fight Hydra or fight aliens, but for some reason driving is still the hardest. I was able to stall an automatic Lamborghini in the first season.

### What's the level of intensity for this season?

They don't get to rest. I'm sitting in a chair covered in fake blood right now.

### What's the appeal of the space storyline this year?

I think people who love other MCU movies will really get a kick out of this season. The aesthetic of the show is completely different. It's so vibrant!

### Is there a moment or line that sums up Daisy the best?

I was just on Instagram the other day and someone sent me the line from the pilot where I say, "With great power comes a lot of weird crap that you are not prepared to deal with," and that line has stayed true to the character. It's what she's been through, and what I've been through as an actor on the show and as a role model for young girls. It's incredible.

GETTY (2)



The dream duo bringing some sass to the show.



# THE COMIC STRIPS PRESENT

Some of the greatest adventures of our favourite heroes take place beyond the screen. In the first thrilling instalment of a major three-part retrospective, Alistair McGown discovers the comic strip tie-ins that defined the decades...

PART ONE:

1960s



ED  
TWILIGHT  
KEY

016-607  
JULY



SERLING

THE COMIC STRIPS PRESENT  
PART ONE: THE 1960s

# THE TWILIGHT ZONE



Destruction follows an astronaut  
back to earth with the mo



RESPONDENT

**T**ODAY EVERY COMIC STRIP hero gets their own movie franchise or TV series, but time was when the opposite was true, with screen heroes spawning comic spin-offs aimed squarely at kids. Until the mid-1980s the UK comics market was huge, and many of those titles told new adventures of familiar faces from the flickering box in the corner of the living room.

As film and television became part of British life, the comics business cashed in. Launched in November 1951, *TV Comic* was originally aimed at very young children, with strips including BBC puppet horse Muffin the Mule. The title's pre-school focus slowly matured. *Four Feather Falls*, a marionette Wild West series from emerging TV puppet master Gerry Anderson, appeared in 1960 and its successor, a show boasting science fiction hardware, seemed a natural follow-up for the comic.

*Supercar* debuted on ITV in January 1961, the wonder craft appearing in *TV Comic* just two months later and shortly afterwards exploding into a colour centrespread which ran successfully until September 1964. Anderson's next stringbound SF space opera, *Fireball XL5*, joined *TV Comic* a fortnight before its TV launch in October 1962, simply drawn in monochrome by Neville Main. ➔





Anderson withdrew his strip rights in autumn 1964 but a ready replacement was found in Roberta Leigh's puppet epic *Space Patrol*. Captain Larry Dart in spinning-top-styled spaceship Galasphere 347 assumed *Supercar's* colour spread – and its artist Bill Mevin – for the next year. On departing *TV Comic*, *Space Patrol* found a perhaps unlikely berth in DC Thomson funnies weekly *Beezer*.

William Hartnell's *Doctor Who* admirably filled *TV Comic's* Anderson gap, first appearing in November 1964, a year on from his screen debut. The Doctor and his grandchildren John and Gillian encountered ridiculous aliens in twee adventures, drawn for a year in black and white by Neville Main before inheriting *Space Patrol's* colour centrespread and artist Bill Mevin. Though Daleks remained absent, the antlike Zarbi appeared direct from TV, except that these were fake flying Zarbi piloted by alien invaders. It was that kind of strip.

Excitable artist John Canning, more suited to action/adventure than his predecessors, ushered in Patrick Troughton at Christmas 1966. The strip soon relaunched on *TV Comic's* cover as *Doctor Who And The Daleks*, when rights to the metal meanies came up for grabs. The Cybermen also regularly featured – even if they remained portrayed throughout the 1960s as the bandage-faced goons of their 1966 TV debut. Less thrillingly, the Quarks, ineffectual spike-headed robots from a lacklustre 1968 TV serial, also appeared several times.

When Troughton left the TV show, exiled to Earth by the Time Lords, the strip filled the six-month hiatus to Jon Pertwee's debut with the clever wheeze of having Troughton's earthbound Doctor staying in a swanky hotel and battling mad professors. The nutty Hartnell and Troughton strips were almost all written by Roger Noel Cook in his evenings off after a hard day at the *TV Comic* office. By issue 19 he bought his first E-Type Jag with his freelance proceeds – and later went on to launch VHS-era soft porn phenomenon *Electric Blue*.

**T** *TV Comic* delivered the first mainstream weekly strip for outlandish secret agents the Avengers (following a one-off annual strip in 1962, and a brief comic run in regional *TV listings* magazines for Honor Blackman's Cathy Gale in 1963-64). The immortal Emma Peel, played by Diana Rigg, debuted in *TV Comic* and on TV screens in October 1965. During a year of light-hearted espionage serials drawn by Pat Williams, one story adopted the TV series' sci-fi angle, pitting Steed and Emma against a monster-mirage-making device.

Parallel with *TV Comic*, a bonkers spin-off strip appeared in girls' comic



*Fireball XL5* followed the missions of the World Space Patrol.

## COMIC CON!

*TV Tornado* whirls into the '60s

*TV Tornado* launched New Year 1967, coming from TV2's publishers City Magazines and produced by World Distributors, utilising the TV licensing connections of the Christmas annuals giant. Crime-fighter the Saint featured in a comic strip alongside stodgy text stories for *The Man from UNCLE*, *Superman* and *Batman*.

Relatively little fantasy TV content included a shortlived *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea* strip, but a clutch of cover paintings by the comic's editor Mick Anglo featured *The Avengers*, Patrick Troughton's *Doctor Who*, *The Prisoner* and *The Invaders* – this despite no related strips and often no feature content inside. Worra swizz!



*June And School Friend* in the spring of 1966. *The Growing Up Of Emma Peel* featured the 14-year-old Emma Knight, learning her judo moves as she saved a young Arabian Princess from an arranged marriage to a cruel, warmongering Sheik. Politically correct? Probably not. *The Avengers'* next home was another girls' weekly, *Diana*, an unlikely placing even given the name shared with Ms Rigg. Against expectation, 26 weeks of glorious colour strips resulted, using suitably eccentric storylines featuring phantom bagpipers, atomic bomb-thieving Vikings and a ray turning animals into killers.

**I**n *The Avengers'* absence, *TV Comic* sought camp thrills with *Adam Adamant Lives!*, the BBC series about a starchy Victorian adventurer awoken in the Swinging '60s, but its year-long 1967 run was a pretty jokey affair.

*TV Comic* may have dumbed down for the kiddies but in January 1965 a new rival blew their twee fare away – *TV Century 21*, published by Gerry Anderson's expanding merchandising arm. Newspaper-style cover designs, with headlines from 100 years into the future, made the title stand out in the newsagents. Editor Alan Fennell had written *TV Comic's* *Supercar* and *Fireball XL5* strips, before promotion to TV scriptwriting for Anderson. STINGRAY LOST! screamed the first issue's cover, with the futuristic super sub having been on screens from autumn 1964. Ron Embleton was the key artist for *Stingray's* first year.

The first issue also launched a *Fireball XL5* strip by artistic genius Mike Noble, leagues ahead of *TV Comic's* juvenilia, while the now rather dated *Supercar* ran as a heavily caricatured funnies strip.

Mysteriously, one strip featured an upper-crust secret agent called Lady Penelope and her hand-dog-featured →



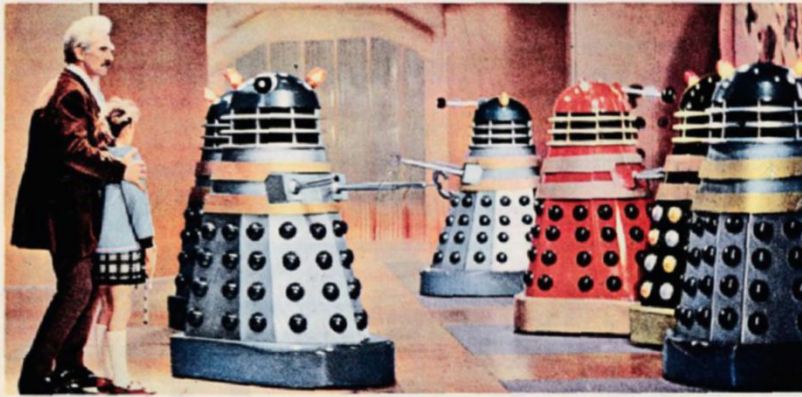
# WIN A REAL DALEK!!!

## TV CENTURY 21

ADVENTURE IN THE 21st CENTURY

No. 28 UNIVERSE EDITION EVERY WEDNESDAY DATELINE: July 31, 2065

### DR. WHO and the DALEKS



Peter Cushing and Roberta Tovey are captured by the Daleks.

#### PEACEFUL THALS AMBUSHED!

**DALEKS! DALEKS! TO BE WON!**

3 REAL FILM DALEKS TO BE WON! PLUS 450 OTHER DALEK PRIZES

PAGES 18-19

FOLLOWING attempts to make peace with the Daleks, the Thals have been viciously ambushed and a fierce battle is still being fought. This was the first frightening news of the Daleks to hit the Universe some eighteen months ago on B.B.C. television.

Now the exciting film, "Dr. Who and the Daleks" is on the cinema screen in glorious Technicolour. You can see it at your local cinema soon.

**SOLTURIAN NEWS AGENCY FLASH:-**

Prince Jaroth has been called in by Mirva to investigate another prophecy of Lurr. It is still not certain whether Lurr is continuing his opposition to the Daleks, or whether this new look into the future is concerned with other events.

(Full story page 20)

**CORGI MODEL CLUB NEWS** — EVERY WEEK PAGE 19

**STOP PRESS**

**LONDON ANT BATTLE**

Reports are coming in of fierce street fighting in the streets of London as European troops struggle to overcome massed armies of giant ants.

**GHOST GALLEON SIGHTED!**

Excited radio message from Lt. Phanos Sheridan of the W.A.S.F. vessel Shilgrey reports sighting a ghostly galleon nearing tracking station 17.

**ACTOR SHOT**

Actor 'Loni' Nelson was shot on the stage of the theatre during a performance of the play 'This Gun for Death'. Captain Amos Burke is investigating.

Doctor Who appears on the front page of TV Century 21.

The Cybermen menaced the Doctor in TV Comic.



The Avengers' Emma Peel starred in girls' comic Diana.



Left: Space Patrol. Above: The Avengers.



chauffeur Parker. The series they hailed from – *Thunderbirds*, of course – wouldn't reach TV until autumn 1965. When *Thunderbirds* finally made it to *TV Century 21* in January 1966 it helped the title become Britain's best-selling comic, with trailblazing ex-*Eagle* artist Frank Bellamy providing stunning strip centrespreads.

A canny addition to the Anderson line-up were national craze *The Daleks*, a back-page fixture for the first two years. Storylines came from Dalek creator Terry Nation, worked up by former *Doctor Who* script editor David Whitaker. Original artist Richard Jennings was replaced in 1966 by Ron Turner, who used vivid colours and stark graphic shadows.

A year after launch, January 1966 brought girl-focused new sister title *Lady Penelope*. At their peak, the two boasted a combined weekly circulation of 1.3 million copies. The aristo spy was chief draw and *Stingray's* mute mermaid Marina had her own solo strip, the mag also going big on spy-fi hit *The Man From UNCLE*, including picture strips and endless pin-ups of blond bombshell Illya Kuryakin. This strip was later logically replaced with sister show *The Girl From UNCLE*.

**L**ady Penelope's fantasy content waned under fascinations with music and fashion, spending 1967 obsessing over TV popsters The Monkees. In 1968 the title became just *Penelope*, its strip heroine soon unrecognisable as she transmogrified into an Enid Blyton-style boarding school gal, then a Swinging London boho chick, before the comic folded at Christmas 1969.

A *Lady Penelope* strip *The Angels*, featuring female fighter pilots, was a cryptic tease to Anderson's next TV series *Captain Scarlet & The Mysterons*, which aired from autumn 1967. This series was also trailed via two strips in inferior sister titles *SOLO* and *TV Tornado* (see panel), both introducing Martian menaces the Mysterons, before a *Captain Scarlet* strip finally launched in issue 141 of *TV Century 21* in September 1967. The stunning art was initially by Ron Embleton, the same artist who created the TV series' end credits paintings of Scarlet in mortal danger.

A January 1968 revamp saw *Scarlet* strips claim the cover, with newspaper-style headlines dropped and the title shortened to plain *TV21*. The slow decline that followed mirrored the Anderson empire's post-*Thunderbirds* waning fortunes. *TV Tornado* was absorbed into *TV21* in September 1968, bringing across terrestrial fare from *The Saint* and *Tarzan*, the SF quotient further diluted by a rush job strip for *Department S*, chronicling the investigations of camp crime writer Jason King from March 1969.

## KEY VALUES

Across the Atlantic, Gold Key brought the screen to the spinner rack

Successful US publisher Dell had been in partnership with Western Publishing since 1938, producing many successful comics including Walt Disney titles. Western decided to go it alone in 1962, taking their media licences with them to forge new comics line *Gold Key*.

Dell enjoyed some success with a long-running comic based on SF anthology *The Outer Limits* (1964-9), and even adapted the 1965 movie version of *Dr Who & the Daleks*, but eventually folded in 1974.

US newsstands were soon groaning under the weight of *Gold Key's* cheap and cheerful pulp fare, grotty printed behind those glossy, dynamic cover paintings.

Having briefly run twist-in-the-tale comics based on *The Twilight Zone* for Dell in 1961, Western went on to produce a colossal 91 *Gold Key* issues between 1962-79.

There were publications for movie and TV mogul Irwin Allen; subsea adventures in *Voyage To The Bottom Of The Sea* (1964-70), time-hopping tales from *The Time Tunnel* (1966-7) and minuscules series *Land Of The Giants* (1968-9). Politics stymied any *Lost In Space* comic; having previously published their strangely similar *Space Family Robinson* comics since 1962, *Gold Key* declined to sue Allen, wary of upsetting the appercart.

*The Man From UNCLE* (1964-9) ran 22 issues, though *The Girl From UNCLE* proved less popular. Quinn Martin's paranoid aliens-among-us fantasy *The Invaders* spawned four comics (1967-8), while ABC's daytime supernatural soap opera *Dark Shadows* proved a surprise success, 35 issues appearing from 1969-76. *Star Trek* meanwhile ran a staggering 61 issues from 1967-79.



The fateful decision was made not to place Anderson's latest puppet hero, bespectacled schoolboy agent Joe 90, into *TV21* after his screen debut in autumn 1968, with spin-off title *Joe 90: Top Secret* launched instead in January 1969. Joe was accompanied by super-powered secret agent trio the Champions and two colour strips featuring US imports; Irwin Allen's little people saga *Land Of The Giants* and, six months ahead of its delayed BBC TV debut, *Star Trek*, which assumed the centrespread. Despite the initial gaffe of referring to Captain Kurt for the first two issues, this strip, brilliantly drawn by Harry Lindfield, soon claimed the cover from its titular hero.

**T**he jam had been spread too thinly – the specy spy should perhaps have boosted *TV21's* flagging sales rather than split the audience – and somewhat inevitably *Joe 90: Top Secret* folded into its parent title after 34 issues. Anderson's merchandising empire crumbled and Century 21 Publishing closed in June 1969, no-frills firm Martspress now handling production for publisher City Magazines.

*TV21* closed after 242 issues in September 1969, before relaunching a few weeks later as *TV21 & Joe 90* #1. *Star Trek*, *Land Of The Giants* and *Joe 90* all continued but after a handful of issues Frank Bellamy jumped ship from *Thunderbirds*, as budgets dwindled.

When *Joe 90* and *Thunderbirds* bowed out in May/June 1970 it was the end of an era. *TV21* carried on without its founding Anderson content but the next decade would see exciting new titles rise from the ashes... ●

Next issue: *The 1970s!*



**Gerry Anderson's**  
**JOE 90**  
80  
TOP SECRET

**LAND OF THE GIANTS**  
INSIDE PAGE 16  
TOP SECRET

IN THE UNFAMILIAR CONTINUITY OF THE LABORATORY, JOE CLIMBS INTO THE RAT-TRAP THE MACHINE BEGINS ITS WHIRLING MOTION.

THEN, AS THE PROCESS IS COMPLETED JOE PUTS ON THE SPECIAL GLASSES THAT ALLOW HIS OWN MIND TO TAKE ON THE NEW BRAIN PATTERN. JOE GOES, MOORE SPECIAL AGENT, TAKES ON THE CHARACTER OF PROFESSOR IAN MCCLAINE...

JUST LIKE I SAID: NO FUDGE OR BULL SHIT HERE! NOTHING TO SURVEIL DIRECTLY! AND THAT'S ALL! CAN HE LIVE! DON'T ASK OF HIS OWN FREE WILL.

WHO'S HE?

THE YOUNG MAN WHO DESTROYED THE PLANS. HIS CAR IS FITTED WITH A DEVICE WHICH WARNS ME WHEN HE IS IN DANGER. HURRY... GET THE ROLLS ROYCE

[illegible]

WINTER 2017 | SFX MAGAZINE | 67



DARK





# Vicious Circle

Time-warping  
twists, '80s nostalgia,  
teens in trouble...  
Is Netflix's German-  
language drama **DARK**  
the new *Stranger Things*?  
Josh Winning meets  
the show's creators

IT'S JULY 2017 AND *SFX* HAS JUST BUMPED INTO *DAREDEVIL* AT a posh hotel. A moment later, Iron Fist comes barrelling down the corridor. This isn't Hell's Kitchen, though. We're at London's Corinthia Hotel for a Netflix love-in, where the cast of *The Defenders* is doing press while rubbing shoulders with the hot new kids on the block. Those new kids are Baran bo Odar and Jantje Friese, and they're about to take the streaming service by storm with their ambitious new series, *Dark*.

While Matt Murdock and Danny Rand head off to chat about their TV team-up, *SFX* is led into a cosy suite to meet Odar and Friese, the real-life

married couple making history as the creators of Netflix's first ever German-language series. Disarmingly modest and friendly, they sip tea by a table of biscuits. Odar's recovering from a stag do. They aren't, you realise, people you'd associate with something as brooding as *Dark*.

"We're both from small towns," reveals Odar, rocking a Spielberg beard and baseball cap. "Usually in Germany, small towns are the nice places where everyone knows each other, but we always felt that there's... When I was a kid, our neighbour was a creepy guy and I remember my mum telling me all these creepy stories about him. But my question was, like, was he actually bad or was my mum bad, telling these stories? I felt like, 'Oh, behind those doors, there are dark secrets.'"

Secrets are at the heart of *Dark*. The 10-episode series, written by Friese and directed by Odar, takes place in the tiny fictional town of Winden. It's November 2019 and 16-year-old Jonas (Louis Hofmann) is still reeling from his father's suicide five months earlier. As he starts a new school year surrounded by whispers, there's something even more troubling stoking the gossip embers – another teen has been missing for two weeks.

And that's just the beginning. "The show centres around four families," explains Friese. "So it's not only one family saga, it's four sagas intertwined. It's about the teenagers, the parents and the grandparents. A boy goes missing from one of the families in a very mysterious way and while the crime plot kicks off in the first episode, you start to see that all →



those characters in the four families have some kind of dark shadows in the cellar.”

Adds Odar: “It’s based on a story we wanted to create for quite a time now, but it was actually more of a crime show in the beginning. When we read it again, we felt like something was missing, and as we did research on serial killers, we felt bored by the story. So we added another spice to it, which is that supernatural twist, and all of a sudden it was interesting for us and Netflix loved it, so they let us do it.”

Quite how the supernatural rears its head remains the show’s biggest mystery. *SFX* has seen the first two (gripping) episodes, and the paranormal undercurrents only begin to make waves toward the end of episode two. While there are echoes of Stephen King, particularly in the small-town setting and the sprawling, interconnected cast, *Dark* doesn’t celebrate nostalgia in quite the same way as its network sibling *Stranger Things*.

“I would say we have more the David Lynch, David Fincher [vibe], if you want to refer to a filmmaker,” says Odar. “The Amblin, nostalgia thing, [where] everything was fine and nice back then, and sweet... we’re different.” Frieze jumps in: “We’re the dark European brother.” Interrupts Odar: “Mother!” Frieze chuckles and adds: “The second cousin.” The theme’s catching as, triumphantly, Odar decides: “We’re the sick uncle who visits once a year.”

## HEART OF DARKNESS

It’s clear why these two decided to make their personal relationship professional. They finish each others’ sentences throughout our chat and are equally passionate about their work. They met at film school, have a daughter together, live in Berlin, and can’t agree over *Dirty Dancing* (she hates it, he loves it, though this may be a joke at Odar’s expense). “We’re interested in the same themes,” says Frieze. “The darkness within us, and why do people become what they are? Why do they choose to turn into the dark passage? That gives us quite a good base to work together. Usually we agree on most things.”

If *Dark* isn’t quite the new *Stranger Things*, it’s certainly got an *X-Files*, *Twin Peaks* aura around it, not least in the way it tackles those mysterious supernatural ingredients. “We are more based on science, to be honest, than in *Stranger Things*, where it’s monsters,” says Odar. “Our supernatural thing is more scientific and based on the Albert Einstein theory that time’s not linear but a circle.”

Indeed, the series begins with an Einstein quote – “The distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly presented illusion” – and *Dark*’s demented narrative loops through three different time periods: 2019, 1986 and 1953. Time itself is both a mystery and a clue. Before Jonas’s father commits suicide,

Oliver Masucci, Jördis Triebel and Louis Hofmann play *Dark*’s central family.



Teenage Jonas is haunted by the death of his father.





GETTY (1)

“There are sins and secrets and they all come to the surface”

he writes a note and labels it: “DO NOT OPEN BEFORE NOVEMBER 4, 10:13PM.”

Elsewhere, the kids talk about Hansel & Gretel. The grown-ups worry about the closure of the local power plant. Everybody's unnerved by the disappearances. Jonas's friend says that her aunt once found a dead, five-legged squirrel near the nuclear plant. Later, a body is found wearing '80s clothing, by a walkman that plays a creepy German pop song about the “time stream”. One character is reading *A Journey Through Time* by HG Tannhaus.

“There are sins and secrets and they all kind of come up to the surface,” explains Friese of this strange brew, “and those secrets don't only have to do with the time now, but also the '80s

## TEUTONIC TRIUMPHS

Five other German classics

### Nosferatu (1922)

The creaky granddaddy of German horror. Officially (wordily) titled *Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, director FW Murnau's unofficial Dracula adap is as creepy today as it was nearly 100 years ago. Brilliantly sent up by Willem Dafoe in *Shadow Of The Vampire*.

### The NeverEnding Story (1984)

An English-language adaptation of Michael Ende's novel by German auteur Wolfgang Petersen. Co-financed by Neue Constantin Film and Warner Bros, it's the perfect marriage of blockbuster and Euro-flash, starring Barret Oliver as the bookish adventurer.

### The Cabinet Of Dr Caligari (1920)

German horror at its most silently pervasive. Werner Krauss plays the manic hypnotist who kills by turning Conrad Veidt into a sleepwalking slaughterer. Roger Ebert called it “the first true horror film”, and he knew what he was talking about.

### Only Lovers Left Alive (2013)

A German-British co-production that takes full advantage of shooting in Hamburg and Cologne, as Tom Hiddleston and Tilda Swinton encounter living German legends (Dr Faust) and hipster bloodsuckers.

### Metropolis (1927)

Fritz Lang's genre-defining sci-fi was decades ahead of its time. Its visions of a robotic future puzzled contemporary audiences, but it's since been lauded as a classic and has influenced everything from the design of C-3PO to choice Lady Gaga lyrics.

and '50s. We look at those characters through three different time periods and it works like a puzzle. With every episode there are new pieces revealed; the fates of all the characters are connected through a phenomena that bends time and space. That's how far I can go at the moment!”

Still with us? Yeah, things are definitely weird in *Dark*, and the show's a marvel of (yes) German engineering. Between them, Friese and Odar have crafted a clockwork-precision mystery that's as complex as it is captivating. “In the end we had 72 characters, not including extras,” reveals Odar of their ambitious pitch to Netflix. “They had a lot of questions of course. Then we had to create a bible; you don't just run and do the show. We went away knowing Netflix liked the idea and the characters, and they read the bible and said, ‘This is all great, but what if this is even bigger at the end?’”

## INTO THE WOODS

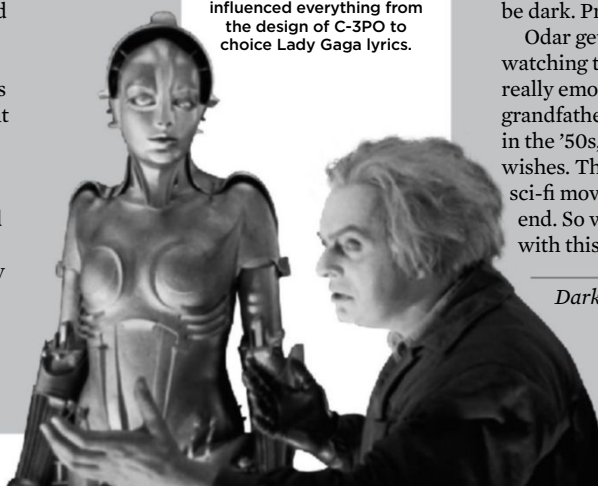
Clearly, ambition isn't in short supply. The series shot over 150 days in and around Berlin, an undertaking that initially daunted Friese and Odar, who had previously worked together on films *Who Am I* and 2010 crime thriller *The Silence*. TV, naturally, is a very different beast. “Beast is the right word!” laughs Friese. “No, obviously in terms of developing it [it's very different], because we have to create 10 hours of content and TV shows work so differently from feature films in the way you treat the characters and work the arc.”

Adds Odar: “Yeah, it was exhausting, but in a good way. I really love shooting. I love the set, I love talking to the crew and directing. It's like a playground telling everyone from right to left or whatever. The only thing you don't like is the cold winter. We were outside and we were literally freezing our asses off. That's the worst thing about it. There was a moment where I felt, ‘I can't do this any more, I can't get up.’ But it's a privilege. We're both from film school so it's our dream to make movies. We always appreciate getting to do it.”

So the show's called *Dark*, but how dark are we talking here? “I think pretty dark!” laughs Odar. “We like dark stuff but we don't think it's dark.” Adds Friese: “I think it's probably a question of perspective, what one considers to be dark. Probably for us it's not that dark.”

Odar gets in the last word again. “Just watching the episodes, we realised we're also really emotional,” he says. “You see the grandfather as a father in the '80s and as a kid in the '50s, his perspective changes and his wishes. The show's not as cold as just another sci-fi movie; it's all about characters at the end. So we felt like it's a very, dark family saga with this emotional sci-fi twist.” ●

*Dark begins on Netflix on 1 December.*





William Shatner  
menaces the Bright  
Knight in BATMAN  
VS TWO-FACE,  
Adam West's final  
caped crusade. Joseph  
McCabe heads to  
Gotham City...

FACE





**W**HEN ADAM WEST LEFT US THIS year for that great big Batcave in the sky, he left behind one last gift for his legions of fans. Before his passing, West returned to the role that defined his career in two animated films. The first, *Batman: Return Of The Caped Crusaders*, was released last year to critical acclaim. Now comes Warner Bros Animation's

follow-up, *Batman Vs Two-Face*, showcasing West's final screen performance on Blu-ray.

Again featuring Burt Ward as the ever-enthusiastic Robin and Julie Newmar as the seductive Catwoman – and written and produced by James Tucker and Michael Jelenic – the film at long last introduces Two-Face to the world of the 1966 *Batman* TV show. Fittingly, the arch-villain is voiced by another icon of 1960s television: William Shatner.

“We knew we were going to do a Two-Face story once William Shatner agreed to do it,” Tucker tells *SFX* at this year's New York Comic Con. “We knew we weren't going to adapt the outline [by Harlan Ellison] from the '66 show that was rejected. Because it was rejected. →



# TAS AT 25

Holy quarter-century!

2017 marks the silver anniversary of one of the most acclaimed of the Dark Knight's incarnations – *Batman: The Animated Series*. After 25 years, the show remains, for many, the definitive take on the character and his world. Developed by Bruce Timm and Eric Radomski in the wake of Tim Burton's Bat blockbusters, *BTAS* embraced the director's retro-futurism but replaced his gothicism with what would come to be known as "dark deco" (in which Timm's minimalistic figures moved across backgrounds painted on black rather than white paper).

The show introduced the world to Harley Quinn – created by writer-producer Paul Dini with Timm – and brought psychological complexity to characters like Mr Freeze, Clayface, Poison Ivy, and Two-Face, while pitting Mark Hamill's belovedly bonkers Joker against Kevin Conroy's unflappable Caped Crusader.

"Batman," says Dini, "looks at a lot of the villains and says, 'There but for the grace of God go I. Because I had the resources and I had the drive and maybe I had a little something in my heart or in my mind beyond what they had.'"

"So he does understand that he's a lot closer to these villains than people would think. That's why underneath he's got a bit of compassion for them. If they can be rehabilitated, he would like to see that rather than see them defeated or locked away or executed. There may be a way back, to some degree, for all of them."



The only thing we wanted was to have something that would merit William Shatner's acting. People who know '60s television know that before *Star Trek* he was all over it, playing really interesting, damaged characters. So it wasn't a stretch that we knew that he could play Two-Face. Because he's played split personality characters before, he's played psychotics before, and he does a great job of it. So it was kind of a no-brainer."

"They recreated the past, so to speak, with the first one," says Burt Ward. "Like, 'Let's get back into it.' Now, they've refined it. Now, the animation is really, really good. The sound, the explosions, the effects are cool. The storyline is very tight. It's just better. I have great fight scenes! It was genius to cast Shatner. Here you



We strongly advise against piloting aircraft while aggravated.



Success was all down to Robin's mean right hook.

have the two most iconic television shows in history – *Batman* and *Star Trek*. There's nothing bigger. You put them together, with the actors working together... When I heard, I knew it was gonna be huge. I was blown away. They couldn't have picked anybody on this planet better than William Shatner. But they also made the script great. They worked on it. They took our suggestions, my suggestions. The people that put this movie together are Batman fans. Every one of them put their soul into this. It's a great movie, period."

Tucker says that Two-Face's presence, particularly that of his alter ego Harvey Dent, results in high personal stakes for Batman.

"This was a unique story, in that in most of the '66 stories Batman didn't have a connection

to the villain that was personal... In this case, the crux of their relationship is their friendship. So in a way, Adam wasn't the motivator of the plot quite as much, because he was the most conflicted. In the movie, you'll see that Harvey Dent is his friend. He has to trust him, but he also has to deal with Two-Face. So it was more of an acting challenge for Adam, to be more inward and more subdued in a way. I don't think he's overshadowed [by Shatner]. I just think it brought out another side of his Batman, that a lot of people didn't get to see in the series."

The writer-producer likens *Batman Vs Two-Face* to the stories the show told in its first season, before camp took centre-stage in seasons two and three.



## SEEING DOUBLE



Genre legend **William Shatner** on voicing Bat-baddie Two-Face...

**How did you go about developing the distinct voices of Harvey Dent and Two-Face?**

**MA** Organically, I guess, is a good word. I allowed the bad guy to emerge out of the good guy, much like a Jekyll and Hyde thing. There are these different voices inside our heads all the time. "Should I eat that candy? Should I not eat that candy?" When I was in the sound booth,

they played a scene where the artist had a little green going [on Harvey's cheek], and then it got bigger... Seeing that, I just fell into doing the voice. As the artist did his thing, I was doing my thing. It was spontaneous.

**What was your relationship like with Adam West?**

**MA** A long, long time ago we did a pilot together, prior to *Batman* and

prior to *Star Trek - Alexander The Great*. It didn't sell, so they made it into a film, and it was fairly well received.

Then each of us went our way. But we would see each other at Comic Cons. We'd be having lunch and sit at a table and talk, and I got to know him over the years and I really admired him. [He was] a lovely, lovely sophisticated man.

Never send Batman and Robin to do a woman's job.

"The series evolved," explains Tucker. "So when you watch the first season of '66, it's not that bright day-glo look. It's more of the Batman we know, because there are a lot of night-time scenes. There's death. There's some seriousness to it. So it's not as tongue-in-cheek and overtly comedic as the show evolved into. It's weird, because *Return Of The Caped Crusaders* embraced the campier, broader quality of the series that most people remember it for. In this movie, we go back to the core of the series in season one where it's a little straighter. I think it works. It's kind of like *Batman* mixed with *The Untouchables* a little bit. Two-Face has guns, and he's definitely trying to kill people. It has a darker tinge, but there's still humour."

### KNIGHT TIME

A lifelong fan of Batman comic books and the 1966 TV show, Tucker offers an insight on Two-Face's enduring popularity.

"In the '70s, when they started purposely leaning towards darker themes, he was just money on the table, because he had an inherently darker theme. That had kind of got softened through the years. The duality just switched to him liking things that had the number two in it. They softened his character a little bit. We acknowledge some of that in our movie. He's a great character. The thing we used that I guess *Batman: The Animated Series* kind of started [on screen] was the friendship between Bruce Wayne and Harvey Dent, which really grounds it."

Regarding his own love of the *Batman* '66 universe, Tucker remarks, "It's one of those shows that grows with you. Because it works on so many levels. It works on the kid level, and then you hit adolescence, teenage years, and the hormones make you lose all sense of humour, and then by college age maybe you're indulging in some alternate substances, and suddenly you rediscover the show and go,

'Wow, I didn't notice all this stuff.' Then it just kind of ripens with you."

"You can tell that the people who made that show read the comics that were out at the time," he adds. "The attention to detail on that show, and the art direction on that show... It was like no other television show before it, and it influenced so many shows after it. Even the comedy in it is very subtle. The average comedy that was on TV then was very broad, very in your face. Batman, particularly in its first season, was very sly and smart. It made it look so easy that people discounted it and turned on it, [but] they enjoyed it at first. It is one of the more literal translations of comics. It reinvigorated Batman. So I will always defend that show."

*SFX* wonders if there's a bittersweet feeling that comes with producing Adam West's final Batman adventure...

"To be honest, I'm still processing it," Tucker tells us. "I have a slow reaction time. So in a year I may be a mess, but right now it's surreal. It hasn't sunk in. I hope he was happy to have done it, and I think he would have been proud at how it turned out."

Ward shares Tucker's feelings as he continues to meet multitudes of Batfans at conventions, with West no longer at his side.

"I knew Adam so well, and he always wanted people to be happy. He didn't want anybody to be sad. That would be a disservice to him... But the only time that it's really hard on me is when I go out signing autographs and I'm talking and having a good time and maybe I look over and see that empty chair. That is tough. That's tough. They do that as a tribute at all of my appearances now."

"That's the only hard time for me," says Ward. "It's like, 'Okay. He'd want me to get back to work,' and I turn around and continue." ●

*Batman Vs Two-Face* is out now. Joseph McCabe is the author of *100 Things Batman Fans Should Know & Do Before They Die*, on sale now.

Two-Face had a plan to win the Go Fish! Tournament.





PLAY THE





EIGHT  
GAME OF  
THRONES  
STARS  
REMINISCE  
ABOUT THEIR  
WESTEROS  
EXPERIENCES  
WITH  
RICHARD  
EDWARDS

**I**T'S THE BIGGEST TV SHOW ON THE PLANET, THE ONE THAT'S TALKED ABOUT MORE THAN ANY OTHER AND BROUGHT BRUTAL FANTASY STORYTELLING TO THE MASSES. BUT WHAT DO THE PEOPLE WHO MADE *GAME OF THRONES* THINK ABOUT BEING PART OF THE WESTEROS JUGGERNAUT? WITH JUST ONE SEASON LEFT TO GO, WE SAT DOWN WITH EIGHT STARS OF THE SERIES TO FIND OUT WHAT IT'S LIKE TO LIVE IN THE SEVEN KINGDOMS...

**JOHN BRADLEY (SAMWELL TARLY)** Somebody asked me to sum up *Game Of Thrones* in three words. I'll always say "fathers and sons" or "fathers and children" – because that's what it's about, fundamentally. And everyone can relate to that. It's dealing with very universal ideas.

**AIDAN GILLEN (PETYR "LITTLEFINGER" Baelish)** I [read the books] a lot at the start. You can get so much from them, but there came a point where there's stuff there that wasn't going to make it into the show, where I think it was unnecessary for me [to know it]. You could probably say more about a character in the first two paragraphs than you're ever going to [learn later], so you've got to read that bit – I think to not read anything would be a mistake – but it's not obligatory to read everything.

**PILOU ASBÆK (EURON GREYJOY)** If you take yourself seriously as an actor, you do your →



preparation. So you read the paragraphs or you read the books so you know what the story is about, and how do you fit into the world of *Game Of Thrones*? But when that is done, it is up to you as an actor, in a collaboration with the writer and the director. My experience is that if it's not in the script, it's not in the character. For Christ's sake, Euron's a pirate. That's all I needed to know!

**LIAM CUNNINGHAM (DAVOS SEAWORTH)** There's not a person on the show that isn't a fan of the show, which is really cool. It's the only job I've ever worked on where we feel like we're on the same journey as the fans, because we're all fans as well. We're all filming our little pieces, and then we watch it the same as everybody else.

**RORY MCCANN (SANDOR "THE HOUND" CLEGANE)** I haven't actually watched all of it. I'm way lost! I've met actors in *Game Of Thrones* and have no idea who they are, and apparently they've been there for years. I am going to watch it, though. I just haven't got round to it.

**BRADLEY** I always used to read the scripts cover to cover, but for the last couple of seasons, I tried to stay as unaware as possible – because there's so much that we're not involved in, we're excited to see 80% of the show as much as everybody else is.

**ISAAC HEMPSTEAD WRIGHT (BRAN STARK)**

Whenever I've got a break, I go and look at all the other sets, and just wander around.

**BRADLEY** I did that once. I had to go to the bathroom, and in between the set and the bathroom, there was the Iron Throne room, in darkness, because there was nothing being filmed in it. You feel like you're suddenly on the set of a show that you love, because you never shot in there. You just turn into a fanboy.

**JACOB ANDERSON (GREY WORM)** I love to go look at the other sets. It's weird, because the only time I've been in the Throne Room, it was being used as storage for the Battle of the Bastards. The Throne was still there and everything, but they had a lot of the dead fake bodies and dead horses and stuff.

## GAME CHANGING

**BRADLEY** The first scene I was blown away by was the Ned Stark beheading back in season one. I think that was the moment where people realised this show doesn't play by the rules. They've killed their lead in the first season! That's when you start to think, "This show is completely unpredictable. I'm going to be unsettled, and it's going to be foolish to predict how this is going to go. Nobody's safe." I think that one scene really set a precedent.

**CUNNINGHAM** I would imagine if you go back and watch from episode one again you'd have that television thing where you can tell they

don't have the budget of a \$200 million studio movie, but as the seasons have progressed, it's become more cinematic.

**HEMPSTEAD WRIGHT** It's funny. You look back at some of the season one stuff, and you think it looks a bit naff.

**MCCANN** You definitely feel that the scale's gone up, and you're going, "Oh my god, this must have cost millions just to make the set, never mind when the hundreds of people spill on to it!" The battles are getting bigger and you can kind of imagine that as they sew up the saga, they're not going to hold back.

**HEMPSTEAD WRIGHT** I think the Battle of the Bastards was just a spectacle. It really summed up how far *Game Of Thrones* has come, and just the epic scale of the brutal warfare.

**CUNNINGHAM** The Battle of the Bastards was an extraordinary thing to be involved with. I remember the first day when we were there, we were sitting in a tent and we knew we had 24 days where we were going to be jumping around with 700 extras and 70 horses. I remember looking at Kit [Harington, aka Jon Snow] and saying, "There's one thing we're going to need in this next month of this. A fucking sense of humour." There was drudgery involved, but we knew that it was going to be a pain in the ass going in.

**MCCANN** It was worth the grief, though, eh?

**BRADLEY** I think we're one of the very few shows that has got better every year. One thing about [showrunners David Benioff and Dan "DB" Weiss] is they give themselves problems, because they always have to outdo what they did last year. You just think, "They've fucked themselves. What are they going to do next year?"



The Hound and Arya struggled to find a picnic spot.



Sam would do anything to get that last biscuit.

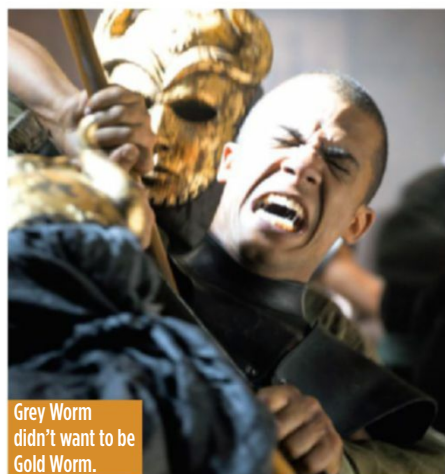


Podrick in one of the few moments he's not in danger.





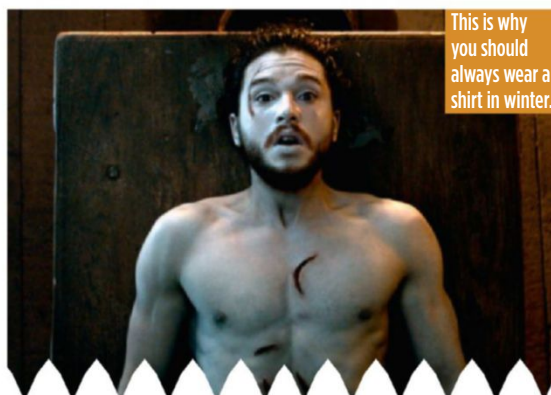
Euron Greyjoy: he's a pirate, that's all you need to know.



Grey Worm didn't want to be Gold Worm.



Littlefinger doing what he does best: scheming.



This is why you should always wear a shirt in winter.



Ser Davos and his noble steed were feeling a bit chilly.

## LEAVING THE BOOKS BEHIND

**CUNNINGHAM** I know George RR Martin rolled out the end of the story to [the showrunners], so they're writing to the spirit of what George's intention was. But I suppose it must be great for them as well, having increased freedom to put more of themselves into the story.

**GILLEN** The source material is so rich, but as soon as the show had to overtake the books it gave them the freedom to maybe write just a little bit more for you [as an actor] – which they probably had been doing anyway, since the start. You can tell subtle differences between what's happening in season two and season one, because season one was already written, and then season two is written knowing the actors who are playing those roles.

**ASBAEK** You're probably not going to get better written roles anywhere else. The characters are so three-dimensional. Even if you're not one of the main cast or a season regular, I still know that I get my moment to establish and portray a character whom I like. And that's all Dan and David's work.

**McCANN** When I get the script these days I feel like David and Dan know me so well that half of the stuff I read is how I would say it anyway.

**CUNNINGHAM** Their characterisations are extraordinary. I always like to use the example of Arya, who's held up as a role model, specifically for young girls. I mean

this kid is a serial killer. She has a fucking list of people in her pocket she's trying to kill, and people are saying, "Go Arya, go!" She's a serial killer, people! That's how clever the writing is on this.

**BRADLEY** The problem that we've always had is that we're telling a story that we don't know the ending of. We don't know if we're telling a story about how even in the blackest of times, good will prevail – or if we're telling a story about how despite what good men do, bad guys can win if you let them. That'd be quite a morally bankrupt story! Or is it about how nobody survives, no matter what? We're not quite sure...

**DANIEL PORTMAN (PODRICK PAYNE)**

We're sort of kept in the dark about what's next – as much as everybody else is – until we're filming it. I think that sort of lends itself to really organic performances from people, because we are genuinely still getting used to the stuff that we're about to shoot when we're

shooting it. It's not like it's embedded in us, and we've been preparing for a huge amount of time to do it. Though because I get to read the scripts before we shoot the scenes, I do know whether or not Podrick's going to make it!

**CUNNINGHAM** There's not an actor on the show that doesn't want to make it to the last episode.

**McCANN** [When the Hound was left for dead at the end of season four] I got a kind of twinkle in the eye [from the producers hinting I'd be back], saying don't worry, but don't tell anyone. Then there was a six/seven month wait, a deal was made, and then it was just shut the fuck up! I had to do a couple of Comic-Cons where I was out of the show, and I was just lying, lying, lying. Fans were looking into it, saying "He's denying it too much now!"

**CUNNINGHAM** It was worse for Kit when Jon Snow died. It tore Kit's soul apart having to keep quiet about it. He said that the worst part of that was when Sophie [Turner], who he met when she started on the show at 13, wrote him this beautiful heartfelt handwritten note saying, "I've learned so much from you, you're like my brother..." when he's thinking, "I'm fucking coming back next year!" He couldn't tell her, and he said that was the worst part of

**McCANN** Every year we start by going round a big table with many of the actors, and there's no talking for the first five minutes because everybody's seeing when – or if – they die! ●

*Game Of Thrones season seven is out on Blu-ray and DVD from 11 December, and available to pre-order now.*



Brought



To Book

# ANDY WEIR

How the creator of *The Martian* struggled to write a second novel

Words by Jonathan Wright /// Photography by Aubrie Pick

**W**hat's it like to have to follow up one of the biggest hit SF books of recent years? It's not a problem most of us will ever have, but this is precisely the scenario that faced Andy Weir when, in the wake of *The Martian*, he began to write a new novel.

But as he worked on a space opera featuring "aliens and faster-than-light travel and telepathy" entitled *Zhek*, things didn't go well. "I feel like it had a lot of good ingredients, but I got 70,000 words in, about three quarters of a book-ish, and I was like, 'This is not good,'" he recalls. "If I were reading this book I would have put it down. It's moving too slow, the plot's meandering, there are too many things going on at once. I tried to write this epic tale and I ended up making a mess, a swamp."

This was, unsurprisingly, not a happy revelation. "I talked to my agent, I talked to my editor, I talked to my mom and I'm like, 'I don't think this is working, I need to write something else,'" says Weir. "And by the way, by this point I have a contract..."

The solution was to junk *Zhek*, a book that will never, according to Weir, see the light of day, although there are elements of it that may be reworked in a different context. "I'm very, very glad I made that decision, although it was very hard at the time," he says. But what to do next? It's perhaps revealing that Weir wrote two opening chapters for different books for his publisher and agent, and invited them to choose which they liked best.

## THE JAZZ AGE

The result is *Artemis*, a fast-moving heist story set on the Moon of the late 21st century. A struggling "smuggler type", Jazz Bashara, lies at its centre. According to Weir, she gradually took over the novel after starting out as "a tertiary character". It's easy to see why. Jazz is feisty, funny and smart, a Moon native with Saudi Arabian roots who's constantly trying to work herself a break – on her own terms rather than those of other people.

Which on a Moon dominated by billionaires is a tough thing to do. Perhaps because of this, some early readers of advance copies have seen the book as being about inequality. This, says Weir, was never his intention. "Anyone who thinks there is a political message in here, they are absolutely wrong," he jokes. "Point them out, and I will go hit them with a stick."

Nonetheless, economics does play a huge part in the book. Researching *Artemis*, says Weir, he wrote a paper to try to explain the commercial imperatives of colonising

near-Earth space. "I mapped the commercial space industry onto the commercial airline industry," he says. "It doesn't have to be correct, it just needs to *seem* right. I'm a writer not an economist." If boosters were more efficient so that it cost \$6,000 to put a human in orbit, he reasoned, "it becomes economically viable to have a tourist economy on the Moon." As someone "way more interested in economics than other people" this was important to Weir. "I was unwilling to entertain the idea of a Moon city until I'd come up with a reason why that Moon city exists," he adds.

Similarly, *The Martian* was also meticulously researched. Indeed, Weir says he thought he was writing it for a "teeny-tiny niche audience of hardcore science dorks". In the event, nothing could have been further from the truth and the book has to date sold more than five million copies in its English editions. A blockbuster movie starring Matt Damon as Mark Watney, a botanist left behind on the Red Planet after his crewmates think he has died, followed.

## MARS ATTACKS

The story of *The Martian*'s success is all the more remarkable when you consider Weir was a complete unknown when he first began writing the book. Having previously taken a three-year sabbatical from his former day job as a software engineer and written a novel that didn't find a buyer, he had grown disillusioned with the world of publishing. *The Martian* first made its way into the world via Weir's website before being released as a self-published Kindle book for 99 cents.

As to why it was such a hit, Weir says he's not sure, but suspects it may have something to do with the central character and his situation. "Nobody roots for the villain in a man-versus-nature story because the villain is nature," says Weir. "No one's like, 'Yeah, get him, Mars!' So there's no divided loyalties, no questionable morals and I don't need to go through a long period of time making you understand the main character's motivations. Everybody immediately understands the idea of, 'Oh, he doesn't want to die. Yeah, I don't want to die either, so we have that in common.'"

Whether readers will identify so closely with Jazz remains to be seen, but Weir seems optimistic about the future. It's good to see. The pressure of following up *The Martian* has been a recurring theme in our conversation. Better to look ahead. Weir hopes to set many more novels in the colony of Artemis, to create, he says, "My own little Ankh-Morpork." Now, that is ambitious. ●

*Artemis* is published on 14 November.

## Biodata

### Occupation

→ Novelist

### Born

→ 16 June 1972

### From

→ Davis, California

### Greatest Hits

→ *The Martian* was

filmed by Ridley

Scott. "It was all

weird," says Weir

of going from

"programming

computers in a

cubicle" to

"hanging out with

Matt Damon and

Jessica Chastain".

### Random Fact

→ Weir would love

to write an episode

of *Doctor Who*.

He says he's

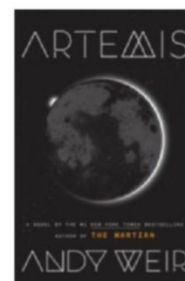
emailed Chris

Chibnall: "I'm like,

'I'll write it for £1 or

for free, whatever

you want.'"







BROUGHT TO BOOK  
ANDY WEIR

**“I TRIED TO  
WRITE THIS  
EPIC TALE AND  
I ENDED UP  
WITH A MESS”**



# WARHAMMER 40,000

In the grim darkness of the late '80s, a tabletop game spawned a vast universe.

Thirty years on, Will Salmon heads to the Imperium of Man...



**G**AMING IN THE LATE '80S AND EARLY '90S was not what it is today. This was a time before the widespread ubiquity of the internet, where consoles from Sega and Nintendo were popular, but still rooted in the limitations of 8- and 16-bit architecture. The first PlayStation was just around the corner and would change everything, but before then another sort of play held a tenacious grip on schoolyards and model clubs around the country. Kids and adults alike were busy collecting and painting armies of metal men: savage, green-skinned Orks; aloof, enigmatic Eldar; deadly alien Genestealers; and the insidious forces of Chaos. Most notable of all, in vast legions of brightly coloured armour, were the many and varied chapters of the Adeptus Astartes – the Space Marines.

*Warhammer 40,000* is a phenomenon. The tabletop-based miniatures wargame turns 30 this year, but rather than fading with time, it's arguably experiencing something of a renaissance. The days of every other kid painting a Blood Angels Devastator squad or straining their eyesight trying to paint the checks on an Eldar Harlequin's trousers may have gone, but the game's universe is better known than ever before, encompassing novels, comics and, yes, videogames.

Before *Warhammer 40,000* there was *Warhammer* – “The mass combat fantasy roleplaying game,” written by Bryan Ansell, Richard Halliwell and Rick Priestley, published in 1983. Although far from original in its setting – this was a fantasy world lashed together from bits of Tolkien, Conan, David Eddings and Terry Brooks – it still had depth and richness. And it had miniatures; lots and lots of gloriously sculpted miniatures, then cast in a child-unfriendly, please-don't-put-them-in- ➔









your-mouth alloy that included lead. It was a huge success.

A science fiction variant was launched four years later at Games Day '87, titled *Warhammer 40,000: Rogue Trader*. A young Jes Bickham was there, and eagerly snapped the book up. It clearly had a big impact on him – he's now the creative writing manager for Games Workshop, which manufactures and publishes all things *Warhammer*. "There was just something deeply inventive and anarchic about it," he says. "It was really dark and a bit satirical at that time."

Indeed, *40K* – as it's known by fans and players – owes as much as it does to *2000 AD* and heavy metal as it does traditional wargames. Take the setting: a sprawling cyber-goth nightmare where compassion is an impossibility and "there is only war". Humanity is besieged on all sides by deadly aliens, corrupted from within by treacherous elements and the only chance of survival lies with the totalitarian Imperium. It's a maximalist universe where war machines stand thousands of feet tall, where there's no such thing as too big a gun, and where everything looks better with a skull on it.

"In the beginning we were producing a bunch of figures with all sorts of wild ideas – it was very freewheeling," says another Jes – Jes Goodwin, today the company's lead miniature designer. "Gradually certain images 'stuck'. We didn't think the game would last that long – fantasy was the big thing then!"

Indeed, while the Space Marines and Eldar would eventually evolve into forces with specific and detailed mythologies, in the early days there was a certain generic 'fantasy-ness' about them, and a more direct sense of humour. Mercenaries would have names like Space-Dout Sam, the Eldar were simply "Space Elves" and the Squats were Dwarves with guns.

## HEROISM AND HERESY

*Rogue Trader* attained a cult following but it wasn't until five years later that the game *really* broke through. Second edition *40K* was the first to come in a big boxed edition starter set, complete with two armies of competing plastic miniatures: a whopping 80 figures split into Ork and Space Marines factions (albeit mostly in the same fixed pose). In 1993 it was pretty much the most exciting thing you could find under your Christmas tree.



Getting ready for battle in their fetching yellow suits.

## “Miniatures take time to make, so you form a bond with them”

By this point the game's lore had become more fully realised. The Marines were no longer simply genetically-enhanced super soldiers, but warrior monks, utterly devoted to an Emperor who may-or-may-not be dead, his body kept in permanent stasis and worshipped as a god. Orks were rampaging through the galaxy, and the monstrous Tyranid hive fleets (think Giger's Alien crossed with the Borg's desire to assimilate) were encroaching into human space. *Warhammer 40,000* wasn't simply a game – it was an entire universe.

While the background (or "fluff" to some) inspired the term "grimdark" – used by fans to gently rib such comically OTT and bleak settings – there's no doubting that the *40K* universe has a genuine potency.

"Because it's lasted 30 years, we've had the chance to put together a compelling universe," says Games Workshop's senior background writer Phil Kelly. "It's fully realised. Some of

the factions are as old as the game itself and they've all grown and developed with time. When people delve into it, they get a feeling of, 'My goodness, this is vast!'"

He's right. Open up the *40K* rulebook, or one of the various army lists (Codexes to the converted) and you'll find a wealth of beautiful art and incredibly detailed fiction expanding on their histories. "Undoubtedly when you have that many factions you'll find some that resonate and speak to you," says Kelly. "People cast their allegiances, they choose their faction and think 'those are my guys.'" And because miniatures take time and effort to make and paint, players form a unique bond with their armies. "You buy them, you put them together and they're not like anyone else's. Maybe you've swapped in a different head, or painted your own colour scheme. Because you've made that investment, there's a bond."

Meanwhile, the figures were growing ever more ambitious. The lead-based models were eventually replaced by lighter white metal versions, while the company also began to experiment more with plastic. "We went from one- or two-part models to multi-part kits in order to maximise the detail," says Goodwin. "That brought in the concept of modular ranges where you could mix and match elements to make your own custom miniature. It allowed us to make larger kits and vehicles, which became a distinctive part of the *40K*





Videogames were now one of the biggest forms of entertainment on the planet. You could buy the latest PlayStation or Xbox title for £40 and be immersed in a game world immediately. By contrast, a basic 40K starter force would cost in the region of £100, not counting the requisite army books and paints, plus beer and crisps to feed your foes. It increasingly felt like the company had become an elitist, expensive model company, with the “Games” part of their name dwindling in importance.

## RESURGENCE

All that changed in 2015 with the arrival of *Warhammer: Age Of Sigmar*. In a risky move the dwindling *Warhammer: Fantasy Battle* was scrapped, replaced with an entirely new game system that was designed to be simpler than the original, and which threw out the established lore almost entirely. It further infuriated much of the company’s hardcore audience but, two years on, it now seems like a genius move. *Sigmar* is faster, cheaper and far less intimidating than *Fantasy Battle*.

Such drastic measures were not required for the still popular 40K, but the company undoubtedly looked to *Sigmar* when revamping the rules for the eighth edition, released earlier this year. The new rules are easy to get to grips with, taking up just a few pages. If you can’t afford the Dark Imperium starter set there are cheaper alternatives available, or you can simply download the core rules for free and play with your existing models.

“Day one, we wanted everyone to be able to play 40K,” says Bickham. “It was a huge task because it’s a new system with new rules. It meant going back to the beginning to redo the rules for every single miniature we make.”

The game’s background has been given an overhaul too – though this is a progression of the story, rather than a reboot. “The galaxy has been split in two by a massive warp rift – basically a tear in the fabric of the universe that’s letting all hell break loose,” says Kelly.

range.” Gone were the days of troops all having the same pose – now they were unique.

Away from the tabletop battlefield the Games Workshop empire was also expanding. While a few 40K novels had been published in the early ’90s (the first being Ian Watson’s *Inquisitor*), the tail end of the decade saw the launch of the Black Library – a dedicated *Warhammer* fiction imprint. Over the following 20 years it would grow and grow, delving deep into the game’s lore with books, comics (now published by Titan) and, in 2010, the entirely forgettable CGI animated movie *Ultramarines*, with Terence Stamp and John Hurt.

But there were murmurings – and eventually fully-blown cries – of discontent from fandom.

Cries of conquest  
echoed through  
the city walls.



## SPIN-OFFS

The main game isn’t the only title set in the 40K universe

The 40K universe has been expanded numerous times through spin-off games. The first, *Space Hulk*, was released in 1989 and pitted squads of Space Marine Terminators against alien Genestealers – four-armed nasties with a dash of Giger’s Xenomorph in their creative DNA. *Battlefleet Gothic* (1999) was a starship-based combat game, while *Epic 40,000* was effectively 40K, but with 6mm infantry – allowing for vast squadrons of tanks, enormous Titan war machines and even worse eyesight in figure painters. Current spin-offs include the *Horus Heresy* titles set 10,000 years earlier and the gang-based *Necromunda*.



“So the good guys are really on the back foot. It’s a time of desperation – the barbarians are not just at the gates, they’ve broken through and are flooding the castle!”

But it’s not all bad news for mankind. Alluded to in 40K lore for decades, but always as a thing of the past, some of the Space Marine Primarchs (the mighty founders of the original Marine Chapters) have returned, who Kelly describes as “demi-gods on the battlefield”. The rank and file Marines, meanwhile, have also had their first significant overhaul since the early ’90s.

30 years after *Warhammer 40,000* first blasted and stomped their way into hobbyists’ lives, it feels like Games Workshop have got their mojo back. You can imagine kids playing 40K again, not just 30-somethings with healthy bank balances, and Bickham says there’s been a direct attempt in the company to re-engage with the players. “We’ve got a community website, we have external playtesters, we’re talking to our customers and listening to their feedback. It’s really exciting.”

And while the game has come a long way since the *Rogue Trader* days, some things remain reassuringly the same. The Space Marines are tough, the Eldar are shiftier and everything looks better with a skull on it. ●



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WINTER  
2017

edited by Ian Berriman

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We like movies  
about gladiators



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→ RATINGS EXPLAINED

★★★★★ SUPERB

★★★★★ GOOD

★★★★★ AVERAGE

★★★★★ POOR

★★★★★ TERRIBLE



CINEMA

## BLADE RUNNER 2049

SPOILER  
WARNING!

To Live And Die In LA



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 163 minutes

▶ Director Denis Villeneuve

▶ Cast Ryan Gosling, Harrison Ford, Ana de Armas, Jared Leto, Robin Wright, Sylvia Hoeks, Lennie James

### Of all the bona fide sci-fi

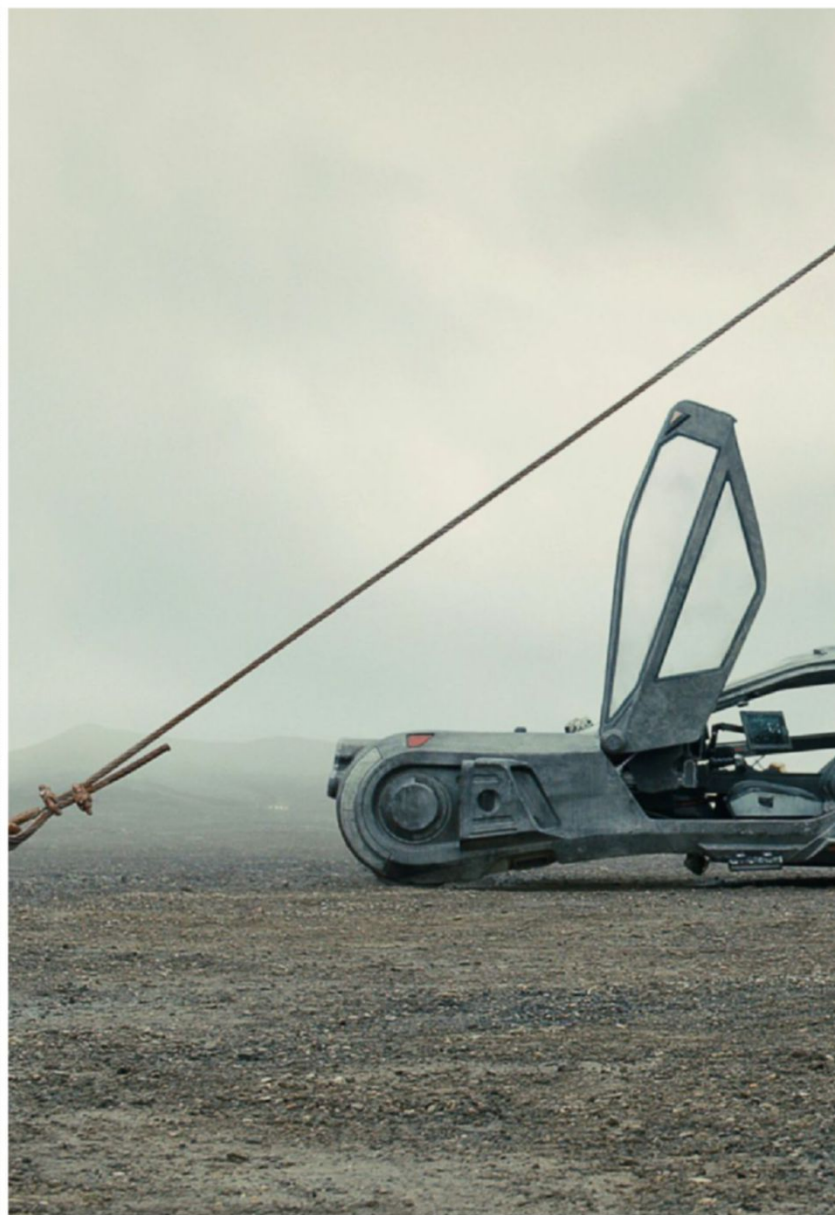
classics, few are less in need of a sequel than *Blade Runner*. For all the much-discussed ambiguity of the Director's Cut, Ridley Scott's dystopian vision was never one to leave you on tenterhooks. An origami unicorn and a door slamming shut is hardly "I am your father" is it?

So the fact that this follow-up – which landed in cinemas some 35 years after the original – is not only far from redundant, but actually an essential extension to the world Scott built on Philip K Dick's foundations, is a remarkable feat. As well as being a logical and satisfying continuation of the story, it's also a sequel of mood, tone and aesthetic – a follow-up built of the same components, albeit with some extra 21st century visual polish.

The hook that drives *Blade Runner 2049* – the revelation that

Rick Deckard and his Replicant girlfriend Rachael had a child, and the subsequent mystery of what happened to it – isn't necessarily the most obvious way to follow the original, yet crucially it proves to be a plotline worth pursuing. It sends Ryan Gosling's professional Replicant hunter K (instantly outed as a Replicant himself, in a neat twist on the ongoing is he/ isn't he Deckard debate) on a labyrinthine investigation that involves significantly more detecting than Harrison Ford had to do first time out – in that regard, *2049* is significantly closer to the Raymond Chandler stories that inspired the first movie. In fact, the movie's rather cleverer than it initially appears, as the overly cute idea that K might be Deckard's son turns out to be an elaborate red herring – it's a big relief when it turns out that the truth is darker and much more satisfying.

Despite what the promotional material would have had you believe, Ford's Deckard is merely a supporting player – part McGuffin, part plot device, part (intentionally) absent father – but that's entirely the right choice for the film. As *The Force Awakens*



showed, Ford returning to an iconic role works best when he's not carrying the movie, but instead handing the torch to the next generation. This is undeniably Gosling's film: K is its driving force and, despite his lack of the usual human emotions, its moral centre.

As with the original *Blade Runner*, the story is considerably less important than the way it's told. It's never less than jaw-droppingly beautiful, upping the scale on Ridley Scott's genre-defining dystopian vision to create an even more vividly realised world. Throwing in giant

“A logical continuation, and a sequel of mood and aesthetic”

holographic figures and a spectacular Los Angeles sea wall, while taking us to new locations like San Diego and Las Vegas (this world has evolved significantly, yet organically, in the three



The modern art museum had a divisive reception.





Ryan's fruitless search for magic mushrooms continued.

intervening decades), director Denis Villeneuve is happy to linger on Roger Deakins's spectacular cinematography. The addition of Hans Zimmer and Benjamin Wallfisch's adventurous score – which sounds like a combination of *Inception*, Vangelis and something entirely different – adds to the assault on the senses.

If awards were handed out for ambition, *Blade Runner 2049* would sweep the board. It's not quite, however, the game-changing classic that some of the slightly hyperbolic early reviews would have had you believe. It has the

same leisurely approach to storytelling as its predecessor, to the point where you could lose 10-15 minutes from the lengthy running time without any detriment to the plot, while Jared Leto's Niander Wallace, heir to the Tyrell Corporation's Replicant empire, is more a performance than a character. But the biggest misstep is that none of the female characters are significantly developed – they're all effectively just foils for the men, whether it's Wallace's henchwoman Luv (Sylvia Hoeks), Robin Wright's sympathetic police chief Joshi, or

Joi, the over-the-counter AI K falls in love with (Ana de Armas).

Still, *Blade Runner 2049* is as good as we could possibly have hoped, a worthy follow-up to a film that has been much imitated but never bettered. It's a rare example of a mega-budget blockbuster that refuses to patronise or give easy answers, and as such its ambiguity will be debated for years to come. *Blade Runner* fans wouldn't have it any other way. **Richard Edwards**

**i** Despite being nominated 13 times, 2049 cinematographer Roger Deakins is yet to win an Oscar. Surely this time...

## PHIL: THE GAPS

The Philip K Dick movies that never came to be



### KING OF THE ELVES

Dick's 1953 short story sees a gas station attendant become the new leader of an elf army after inviting them in out of the rain. In 2008, Disney added a 3D animated movie to their 2012 slate. The project never came to fruition, but you can see concept art at animator Aaron Blaise's website: [www.bit.ly/kingelves](http://www.bit.ly/kingelves).

### A SCANNER DARKLY

Dick's 1977 novel centres on an undercover police agent who develops a split personality due to a hallucinatory drug. After *The Fisher King*'s success, Terry Gilliam tried to interest TriStar Pictures. In 1997, *Being John Malkovich*'s Charlie Kaufman also wrote a script. Richard Linklater finally got the book to the screen in 2006.

### UBIK

The protagonist of this mind-bending 1969 tale works for an agency that stops telepaths invading people's privacy. In 1974, Jean-Luc Godard collaborator Jean-Pierre Gorin got Dick to pen a script, but funding fell through. In 2011, Michel Gondry laboured on adapting it, eventually deciding, "It doesn't have the dramatic structure to make a good film."



They couldn't find any armour to fit Hulk. Hulk mad.



## THOR: RAGNAROK

Kiss my Asgard



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 130 minutes

▶ Director Taika Waititi

▶ Cast Chris Hemsworth,

Cate Blanchett, Tom Hiddleston,

Mark Ruffalo

◆ **Endless darkness; a great, god-slaying winter; the sun swallowed by a giant wolf...** It's not the most obvious comedy material, is it? But as *Thor: Ragnarok* proves, ancient Norse apocalypse is funnier than you ever dreamed.

Brought to the screen with an eyeball-punching '80s palette, filled with visuals that homage the comic book showmanship of Jack Kirby, this is as far from the Twilight of the Gods as you can get. *What We Do In The Shadows* director Taika Waititi –

a counter-intuitive choice to helm an Asgardian epic – brings an infectious new irreverence to the Thunder God's world. He's unafraid to rug-pull the noble heroics with a killer sight-gag or tip cosmic grandeur over the edge of absurdity. In fact he's made Marvel's funniest movie yet. At one point Loki declares, "I'm asking for safe passage through the anus," a line that manages to make perfect narrative sense while simultaneously busting your ribs.

“The film never stops winking at us”

We're in on the joke from the opening moments. "I know what you're thinking," says a captive Thor, straight to camera. He's really addressing the skeletal remains of a fellow prisoner but the conspiratorial pact with the audience is established. And the film never stops winking at us. Robbed of his mane and his hammer, Chris Hemsworth perfects his klutzy jock act in a story that makes Thor as much the butt of the joke as sardonic observer of it. Essentially he's *Big Trouble In Little China*'s Jack Burton with lightning powers.

The threat comes from Hela, goddess of death, played with camp relish by Cate Blanchett as an unholy amalgam of Cruella De Vil and Shakespear's Sister. As she seizes power in Asgard, Thor and

Loki rock up on the junk-littered world of Sakaar, a gladiatorial locale torn from the pages of *Planet Hulk*. Thor's brawl with the big green guy delivers a satisfyingly old-school Marvel punch-up – the CGI Hulk is the most expressive we've seen – but it's Hemsworth's banter with Mark Ruffalo's neurotic Banner that's the winning double-act.

It's flawed: the parallel plotlines on Sakaar and Asgard never feel as tightly intertwined as they might. Doctor Strange's presence is pretty much redundant. And, as with the *Guardians* movies, you wish Marvel would show at least a little reverence towards its fabulously imaginative cosmic lore.

But these are minor quibbles in the face of such a remorseless joy-blitz. Part Douglas Adams, part Led Zep-soundtracked electro-Viking rock 'n' roll carnage, this is a hoot of a movie, establishing Waititi as the new trickster god of the MCU. **Nick Setchfield**

**i** Taika Waititi voices Korg, a Kronan. Also known as the Stone Men of Saturn, they were Thor's first foes in the comics.



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CINEMA



The new sleep-monitoring app took things a bit too far.

## THELMA

### She's Lost Control

★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 109 minutes

▶ Director Joachim Trier

▶ Cast Eili Harboe, Kaya Wilkins,

Henrik Rafaelsen, Ellen Dorrit Petersen

❖ **At the start of this Norwegian-language sci-fi-horror**, a father takes his daughter out onto the ice to hunt. When the child ventures out to look at a deer, he aims the gun at the back of her head and almost pulls the trigger. It's ominous foreshadowing for a film about nature, instinct, family and violence that builds as a beautiful coming-of-age/coming-out movie, and grows chillier and more brutal by the minute.

Eili Harboe plays the titular girl in the body of the film, now older and enrolled in university – against the wishes of her strictly religious parents, who constantly

check up on her. It's an awakening for Thelma, as she tries alcohol for the first time and begins to form a powerful relationship with fellow student Anja (Kaya Wilkins).

These new feelings initially manifest as fits – Thelma is prodded and poked, and diagnosed with non-epileptic seizures – but eventually she realises they are powers, ones she struggles to control, triggered by moments of guilt and desire. And with power comes responsibility, as all good sci-fi tells us.

*Thelma* explores that theme with harrowing results. Think a slow-burn arthouse *X-Men* meets *Carrie*, packed with indelible imagery as icicle shard-sharp as that unshakeable opening promises. **Penny Archer**

**i** Director Joachim Trier says he was "very much inspired" by George Romero's 1973 film *Season Of The Witch* (see p97).

## GEOSTORM

### Outlook: poor

★★★☆☆

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

12A | 109 minutes

▶ Director Dean Devlin

▶ Cast Gerard Butler, Jim Sturgess, Abbie Cornish, Andy Garcia

❖ **Given Dean Devlin's history** conjuring up some of the biggest and (commercially, at least) successful disaster movies of the '90s and early '00s as co-writer and producer alongside Roland Emmerich, you might imagine that he'd bring that experience to his first stint in the director's chair. Yet instead of a fun, exciting ride that channels some of the madness he was known for, *Geostorm* is, while not a total disaster in the other sense of the word, a bland, patchworked, clichéd chore.

The plot should prime us for entertaining chaos: after the weather became increasingly

devastating, the world banded together to create a network of satellites that can control climate conditions. Now, though, things are starting to go badly wrong – peoplecicles in Brazil, for example – and as scientist Jake Lawson (Gerard Butler) and his White House staffer brother Max (Jim Sturgess) discover, it might not be an accident.

The idea that Butler has helped to build a structure in space might be the most far-fetched concept here, especially in a year that has seen huge, destructive storms. And

“A bland, patchworked, clichéd chore”



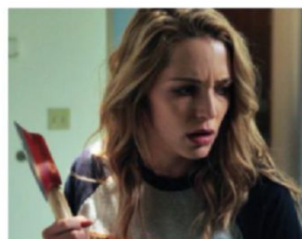
The security camera captured the office fridge thief.

the movie somehow wastes even his particular gifts by shunting him into orbit for most of the runtime. While he never punches a cloud (boo), he does get to partake in some fisticuffs (hooray). For the most part, though, the movie doesn't indulge in the sort of winking outrageousness you might expect, and that's more of a problem. Had it ended up a crazed,

entertaining mess, it would work on a whole other level. As it is, this remains a missed opportunity, and you can see why its release has been delayed a couple of years. Stormy weather? More like a mild drizzle with the occasional monsoon of CGI. **James White**

**i** The character of hacker Dana (Zazie Beetz) was added during two weeks of reshoots overseen by Danny Cannon.





## HAPPY DEATH DAY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 96 minutes

► Director Christopher Landon

► Cast Jessica Rothe, Israel Broussard, Ruby Modine, Rachel Matthews

❖ **Once you get past the** inescapable fact that *Happy Death Day* rips its central conceit straight from *Groundhog Day* – something that's nodded to late on in the movie – there is enough to enjoy in the new Blumhouse stalk-and-slasher that you won't mind the cinematic thievery.

That's in large part down to an appealing central performance by Jessica Rothe as the unusually named Tree Gelbman, who finds herself repeating the day of her death over and over again. In concert with director Christopher Landon and writer Scott Lobdell, Rothe modulates her performance from its starting point as standard sorority mean girl, and allows the character to grow and change via her experiences. Think Cordelia from *Buffy* season one compared to Cordelia from *Angel*.

The horror side of things is relatively rote, and some of the scare scenes feel awfully familiar – the lights go out! There's a noise! She turns, and the killer is in front of her! – but it's helped by the fun of the time-looping. Of particular note is the montage where Tree effectively discovers her morbid superpower and tries to make the most of knowing what is to come from the more mundane elements of her day. Lightweight but likeable, *Happy Death Day* ends up as more than just *Groundhog* Slay.

James White



## PROFESSOR MARSTON AND THE WONDER WOMEN

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 10 NOVEMBER**

15 | 107 minutes

► Director Angela Robinson

► Cast Luke Evans, Rebecca Hall, Bella Heathcote, Connie Britton

❖ **William Moulton Marston** was a bit of a kinky bugger, and you can see his sexual proclivities laid bare in the *Wonder Woman* stories he wrote in the '40s. There's bondage, spanking, domination, submission... enough to get the authorities sniffing around him. As if that wasn't enough, he had a polyamorous relationship with his wife Elizabeth (Rebecca Hall) and their student Olive (Bella Heathcote).

It's an intriguing setup, but the execution is uneven. The film can't decide if it wants to be a love story, a kink-fest or a hymn to *Wonder Woman* – and in trying to split itself, the result is either too heartfelt, awkwardly erotic or confusing (Marston's arguments about how *Wonder Woman* is “empowering women” because she submits to Steve Trevor make no sense whatsoever).

It's still enjoyable, though, and Hall in particular gives a mesmeric performance as Elizabeth, a spiky feminist in an era that couldn't comprehend such a thing. You might not learn much about *Wonder Woman* that you didn't already know, but you'll certainly appreciate the courage of those who fought against the norms of society in a less enlightened age. **Jayne Nelson**



## FIREWORKS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED 15 NOVEMBER**

12A | 90 minutes

► Director Akiyuki Shinbo

► Cast Suzu Hirose, Masaki Suda, Mamoru Miyano, Kana Hanazawa

❖ **Japan's big on time-bending** tales. There were *Groundhog Day* comedies in anime before *Groundhog Day* was made, and most people forget that *Edge Of Tomorrow* was based on a Japanese novel. *Fireworks* is a school-age romcom where a boy gets magic second chances to run off with the girl that he fancies.

In a seaside town, Norimichi and his male best friend both go googly-eyed over their classmate, pretty Nazuna. Unbeknownst to them, she's having serious personal issues. Out of nowhere, she challenges both to a swimming race; the winner will take her to a fireworks festival (a midsummer tradition in Japan). Norimichi loses, but finds a strange little ball that can reverse time a few minutes or hours. Naturally, he uses this power to be with Nazuna, gradually learning about her situation, but realises that the world is changing very strangely with each reset.

*Fireworks* is a passable effort if you love anime and/or time-changing stories, but it's less clever or inventive than many *Family Guy* time-travel episodes. The visuals are shiny, but often clumsy and artless, and the story's whole point is obscure. And the attempts at puppy-love charm are undercut by queasy scenes of the boys harassing their buxom female teacher. A tepid, mediocre film – more of a squib than fireworks. **Andrew Osmond**



## FLATLINERS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

15 | 110 minutes

► Director Niels Arden Oplev

► Cast Ellen Page, Diego Luna, Nina Dobrev, James Norton

❖ **Don't be fooled by the fact** that Kiefer Sutherland's in this – it's definitely a remake of Joel Schumacher's *Flatliners*, not a sequel. So when medical student Courtney (Ellen Page) nags her classmates to stop her heart while scanning her brain so that she can prove there's life after death, Sutherland's character doesn't burst in to stop them by explaining why it's a terrible idea. Nope, they have to work through an exhaustive list of horror clichés to figure that out.

Derivative, boring and almost painfully stupid, it's hard to find anything to recommend. Scrubbing the original's religious undertones should've opened up space to explore what death means to people who don't believe in anything beyond, but instead director Niels Arden Oplev shoves in some superficial platitudes about owning up to your mistakes and being nice to people and hopes that'll pass as insightful.

It doesn't. As a morality tale, this is childish; as a horror movie, it's a disaster, it's scares dulled by over-familiarity and dodgy editing. What does that leave? As a remake, it only functions to make the 1990 version look better. Just as Courtney could've saved herself some heartache by clueing Sutherland's crotchety old professor into her flatlining plans, you can save yourself wasting two hours by watching the original. **Sarah Dobbs**



## SPIDER-MAN: HOMECOMING

Vulture shock

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 20 NOVEMBER**

(Out now on download)

2017 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K/standard)/DVD/  
download

▶ Director **Jon Watts**

▶ Cast **Tom Holland, Zendaya,  
Laura Harrier, Michael Keaton**

### ● Nobody wanted another

Spider-Man reboot until they got one... and then it all made absolute sense. This latest iteration of Spider-Man is perfect, a Spider-Man precision-engineered for the MCU now that Sony's allowing Disney to play with its toys (Marvel having sold the screen rights for Spidey to Sony decades back). Because whatever you think of the two *Amazing Spider-Man* movies starring Andrew Garfield, his Spidey was not what the MCU needed, not least because he was too old for the part.

Marvel wanted a Spidey closer to the one Stan Lee created back in 1962 – a young teen, not a young adult, struggling with school life as much as supervillains. That's what they've given us. Tom Holland's wide-eyed, exuberant Peter Parker/Spider-Man is not some angsty X-youth moaning about

their powers being a curse. He's the kid who's relishing his powers, who can't wait for the school bell to ring so he can get swinging. It's a brilliant piece of casting – as crucial as Marvel's masterstroke of making Robert Downey Jr Tony Stark. He totally inhabits the role, with shy-boy charisma and a lithe physicality, simultaneously gawky and athletic. There will, no doubt, be an ongoing debate about whether Holland or Maguire is the best Spider-Man (sorry Garfield...) but the truth is they're both excellent in different ways.

Whether *Homecoming* is a better Spider-Man film than the first two Sam Raimi films is a trickier question. It's certainly hugely entertaining. Once again, Marvel has created a hybrid, merging the superhero genre with the high school movie; it's no coincidence that *Homecoming* riffs on *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* at one point, and there are other moments when it's pure John Hughes. All the main teen characters impress (especially Zendaya's MJ, clearly channelling Ally Sheedy's moody misfit Allison in *The Breakfast Club*) and the cast is pleasingly diverse.



He didn't think his new fitness class would be this hard.

It's also a movie that reveals a new viewpoint on the MCU. *Homecoming* gives a real sense of what it's like to be normal people living in a world of superheroes. That comes not just from the kids but from Michael Keaton's Adrian Toomes, the MCU's answer to Walter White – a blue collar worker, shafted by the authorities, who becomes a supervillain to provide for his family. For once, the Big Bad isn't the weakest link in a Marvel movie, with Keaton turning in a compelling and believable performance. *Homecoming's* cameos from existing MCU characters also support rather than overpower the film; Downey Jr's Stark hasn't

“Peter isn't angsty – he's the kid who's relishing his powers”

been this likeable since the first *Iron Man* film.

There are problems. Peter's best bud Ned is a fantastic character, but did he *have* to become yet another MCU techie genius, hacking into Stark systems with ease? The big Vulture/Spidey showdown at the end is a letdown



Don't leave Spider-Man in your home unattended.





– neither visually spectacular nor emotionally engaging – while the earlier Staten Island Ferry action sequence stretches credulity too far for this movie. Thankfully, *Homecoming* is a superhero film in which the action really does play second fiddle to the human, or superhuman, story. This Spider-Man truly is amazing.

• **Extras** An enjoyable if a little light range of extras. The deleted scenes (16 minutes) contain some pleasant surprises. Alongside seven trad deleted clips, there's also an extended version of the vlog Peter Parker makes at the start of the film (six minutes), a hilarious three-minute Midtown High News bulletin and a whole new doomed

romance subplot for teacher Mr Henderson, edited into a two-minute montage. The gag reel is short but sweet (two minutes) and there's a fun feature with Tom Holland and Jacob Batalon discussing "Pros And Cons of Spider-Man" (three minutes) in which Holland agrees with what Tobey Maguire's Spider-Man said in his second film – the costume *does* chafe.

The six making-of featurettes – "A Tangled Web" (six minutes), "Searching For Spider-Man" (eight minutes), "Spidey Stunts" (six minutes), "Aftermath" (five minutes), "The Vulture Takes Flight" (six minutes) and "Jon Watts: Head Of The Class" (five

minutes) – are full of enthusiastic talking heads interviews and great behind-the-scenes footage, but they're all very brief and a tad fluffy. It's interesting to learn just how often Tom Holland (and not his double) was inside the suit doing his own stunts, but there are too many "he/she was perfect for the role/job!" soundbites and not enough real analysis of how everything came together (especially regarding the co-operation between Sony and Disney). You also get complete versions of the Captain America PSAs, and a gallery. **Dave Golder**

**i** Principal Morita is the grandson of *The First Avenger's* Howling Commando Jim Morita – also played by Kenneth Choi.

## EASTER EGGS

Four reasons to hit pause

### MIDTOWN MURAL

Keep 'em peeled for some art on the wall at Peter's high school: it includes the likenesses of Howard Stark (as played by John Slattery) and Super Soldier serum creator Dr Erskine (Stanley Tucci).



### BANNER ADD

Above the whiteboard in Peter's chemistry class is a row of images of scientific greats like Newton and Einstein. On the far right is Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner.

### HANDED ON A PLATE

When Peter "interrogates" Aaron Davis, you can see the licence plate on his car reads UCS-M01. The first Spidey comic to feature the character's nephew, Miles Morales, in the starring role was *Ultimate Comics Spider-Man* issue #1.



### MARK MY WORD

When Peter sits down on top of a street lamp after the high-tech bank heist, you can see the word BAGLEY painted on a building behind him in large white letters – a nod to *Ultimate Spider-Man* artist Mark Bagley.







## DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

- 🍷 Dustin draws attention to his new teeth.
- 🍷 Someone has a nose bleed (double swig if they bleed from both nostrils).
- 🍷 There's a tracking shot down a corridor or tunnel.
- 🍷 Eleven slams a door using her telekinetic powers.
- 🍷 There's a visual or verbal reference to Ronald Reagan.
- 🍷 Someone says the word "tubular".
- 🍷 There's a pumpkin in shot – real or plastic, pristine or mashed.

# STRANGER THINGS 2

Pretty In Goonies ET Club: The Sequel



▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2017 | SVOD

▶ Creators **The Duffer Brothers**

▶ Cast **Millie Bobby Brown, Gaten Matarazzo, Natalia Dyer, Finn Wolfhard, David Harbour, Winona Ryder**

**NETFLIX** The first season of *Stranger Things* was an unexpected hit that hijacked the zeitgeist. Its irresistible combination of '80s nostalgia, geeky references and supernatural thriller made it the right show at the right time. The chances of recapturing that magic were always going to be slim. Somehow, though, lightning did strike twice... with the movie version of *IT*.

Which left *Stranger Things* season two with an even bigger

uphill struggle. The good news is that it's a perfectly decent follow-up. The bad news is that it's only a perfectly decent follow-up. The show's already used up its novelty value; it can no longer rely on the gaming in-jokes and '80s movie allusions. In and of itself, season two is an effective sci-fi horror series, especially when it comes to its exciting and visually spectacular final two episodes. But you just know casual viewers who embraced the first season's unique vibe are going to come away thinking, "S'okay, but wasn't as good as the first one."

Hawkins still lives in the shadow of Hawkins National Laboratory, where the fallout from season one is being contained by new bosses. Will Byers may have

been rescued from the Upside Down – a nightmarish alternate version of Hawkins – but he's still connected to a shadow beast there. And that connection threatens to unleash horrors through the gap between the worlds. Meanwhile, Eleven is hiding in the woods with Sheriff Hopper, and starts wondering about her origins.

Eleven's arc is one of the show's weaker links. It seems almost perverse of the show to isolate her for much of the season, given that her amusingly awkward interactions with the other kids were a highlight of season one. Also, the "search for your origins" plot is such a sci-fi cliché, and often the discovery reduces the appeal of the character. Certainly, Eleven feels less interesting by the

season's end, and her standalone episode (2.07) feels like it comes from another show.

Elsewhere, a new girl, Max, drives a wedge between the younger boys; Nancy and Steve's relationship is on the rocks; and Dustin gains a new pet from the Upside Down – Dart. You know that's probably going to end in tears. Or a dead cat.

The characters are still adorable (Will's wailing mum, Winona Ryder, aside), especially motormouth Dustin – Gaten Matarazzo is clearly a star in the making. It's sweet and funny and quirky in all the right places. There are some very effective CG monsters and some excellent action sequences. But it's also a little slow to get going, and lacking in any really gobsmacking plot twists or surprises. Season two is good. But it's not *quite* good enough given the weight of expectation. **Dave Golder**

**i** Co-creator Matt Duffer says he's always turning off "smooth motion" on friends' TV sets so they see the show at its best.





## CULT OF CHUCKY

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2017 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Don Mancini

▶ Cast Fiona Dourif, Brad Dourif, Jennifer Tilly, Alex Vincent

❖ **No slasher franchise can** survive more than five sequels without descending into irredeemable campiness, right? Wrong. *Cult Of Chucky* is the seventh *Child's Play* movie, and yeah, for a while killer doll Chucky (Brad Dourif) did turn into one of those irritatingly quippy baddies, but creator Don Mancini might just have found a way to give him back his edge.

Unfortunately for viewers new to the franchise, that means this is a terrible place to start. It's a continuation of 2013's *Curse Of Chucky*, with survivor Nica (Fiona Dourif) committed to a mental asylum, having been convicted of Chucky's crimes. But it also brings back Andy (Alex Vincent) from the first two movies, plus Tiffany (Jennifer Tilly) from *Bride and Seed Of Chucky*; there's even a post-credits cameo from another franchise character (who's also played by the original actress).

With all that going on, this could've been a self-indulgent mess, but once you get past the nostalgic bits, it's pretty creepy. The hospital setting makes Chucky menacing again, the murders are gleefully gory, and Fiona Dourif is fantastic in a role she might have been born to play.

❖ **Extras** Commentary by Mancini and puppet master Tony Gardner; three behind-the-scenes docs (18 minutes total); three deleted scenes (five minutes). **Sarah Dobbs**



A little over the top for just going in the greenhouse.

## GEORGE A ROMERO: BETWEEN NIGHT AND DAWN Not a zombie in sight

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1971-1973 | 18 | Blu-ray

& DVD (dual format)

▶ Director George Romero

▶ Cast Raymond Laine, Jan White, Lane Carroll, Will McMillan

❖ **Lasting success did not come** quickly to George Romero. While 1968's *Night Of The Living Dead* was an instant hit, it would be another decade before *Martin* and *Dawn Of The Dead* crowned him the king of horror. He wasn't inactive in the interim, mind. This set collects three little-seen films released between 1971-1973.

Most will skip *There's Always Vanilla*. A rare excursion away from horror, it's a humdrum romance set against the backdrop of '70s Pittsburgh's music scene. Visually interesting in places, it's sabotaged by protagonist Chris being an unlikeable, negging creep.

Far better is *Season Of The Witch*, a curious melodrama with ambiguous dashes of the supernatural. Jan White is excellent as Joan, a neglected

suburban housewife who turns to the occult. Rooted firmly in the mundane, it's nevertheless a witty, weird antecedent of Anna Biller's *The Love Witch*.

Most fans will be familiar with *The Crazies*. Minimal in plot (a viral outbreak in Pittsburgh sends people insane) it transcends its budgetary limitations with pitch-black humour, while Romero's documentary-style flourishes echo both the end of *Night* and the beginning of *Dawn*.

❖ **Extras** *Season Of The Witch* has an optional extended cut (14 minutes longer). "When Romero Met Del Toro" is a charming, hour-long chat between the two directors. *Vanilla* comes with a new retrospective piece, while *The Crazies* has some previously unseen behind-the-scenes material and a locations featurette. Plus: commentaries on all three films; candid archive interviews with Romero and Jan White; a 60-page booklet and more. **Will Salmon**

**i** Romero's preferred title for *Season* was *Jack's Wife*. Instead, it was released as the porno-sounding *Hungry Wives*.



## IN MY MIND

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2017 | E | Blu-ray

▶ Director Chris Rodley

▶ Interviewees Patrick McGooohan, Catherine McGooohan, Lewis Greffer, Lew Grade

❖ **What do we want?**

Information! Fifty years after *The Prisoner* boggled the minds of a nation, this documentary looks back at an attempt to get some answers out of Patrick McGooohan, creator of the surreal, metaphorical TV show about a retired spy whisked away to a mysterious village.

In 1983, inexperienced filmmaker Chris Rodley snagged a commission from Channel 4 to interview the actor for documentary *Six Into One: The Prisoner File*. McGooohan was so unhappy with the first attempt that he insisted on a do-over. That previously unseen footage is the chief selling point here, as Rodley retraces a trip to LA and recalls his dealings with the recalcitrant, retiring star. Sadly, it's so bland (and poorly composed) that McGooohan's judgement is vindicated. Glimpses of him tetchily calling the shots are more revealing.

Fortunately take two was an improvement, presenting a more open, avuncular McGooohan. And supporting material – a 1977 Canadian TV interview; home movie footage of the series filming; a new interview with McGooohan's daughter, Catherine; production design images – fills the gaps to tell the story properly. Third time's the charm, then.

❖ **Extras** An outtake from the '80s interviews; Catherine McGooohan interview.

**Ian Berriman**



# WAR FOR THE PLANET OF THE APES

The Primate Directive

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 27 NOVEMBER**  
(Out 10 November on download)

2017 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K/3D/standard)/  
DVD/download

▶ Director **Matt Reeves**

▶ Cast **Andy Serkis, Woody Harrelson, Steve Zahn, Karin Konoval**

◆ **The warmongering title** of this final instalment of the *Apes* prequel trilogy is slightly misleading. Yes, there's conflict (on a planet, with apes), but this is far from the epic human v simian slugfest the name implies – the movie is much more subtle and satisfying than that.

It's to returning writer/director Matt Reeves's credit that it eschews the traditional bigger-is-

better model of most franchise closers, to tell a more character-driven tale. In fact, lead chimp Caesar's (Andy Serkis) vengeance-fuelled mission to take down human military leader the Colonel (Woody Harrelson) owes as much to classics like *Apocalypse Now* or *The Great Escape* as any battle-heavy actioner. It's extremely intelligent storytelling, confident enough to have extended sequences with no spoken dialogue, and give its seemingly crazed antagonist a decent arc – despite first appearances, Harrelson isn't just playing some scenery-chewing army villain.

While we've almost come to take the brilliance of the performance-captured apes for

granted, here they're taken to the next level. As well as being photo-real to the point you forget they're CG, they're capable of displaying empathy and emotion that would be beyond many entirely human actors. All of their actions feel plausible – even the small group of gorillas who've defected to work with the humans – which means you actually care about their plight. Just try keeping a dry eye when Caesar is reunited with his youngest son.

With the nods to the original *Planet Of The Apes* ramped up considerably – apes on horseback on a beach, mute humans – *War* starts to neatly close the circle with the first Charlton Heston movie. It's a near-perfect conclusion to a reboot series that's always been a cut above the average blockbuster saga.

“This is extremely intelligent storytelling”

◆ **Extras** The movie gets the extras it deserves both in terms of quantity and quality. “Waging War For The Planet Of The Apes” (30 minutes) and “Weta: Pushing Boundaries” (11 minutes) are more intelligent than the average making-of fare, while “All About Caesar” (13 minutes) goes in-depth on the simian hero. “Apes: The Meaning Of It All” (20 minutes) looks back at the entire *Apes* franchise and “The Apes Saga: An Homage” (eight minutes) highlights the new movies' many reference to the original films. The most notable moment, however, comes on “Music For Apes” (six minutes) where composer Michael Giacchino meets percussionist Emil Richards, who's worked on every single *Apes* movie. You also get commentary by Matt Reeves, 10 deleted scenes (23 minutes), a concept art gallery and trailers.

Richard Edwards

Steve Zahn appears in the flesh when Bad Ape steals a gun and rides off on a horse – they just put him in a parka!



## BATMAN VS TWO-FACE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2017 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director **Rick Morales**

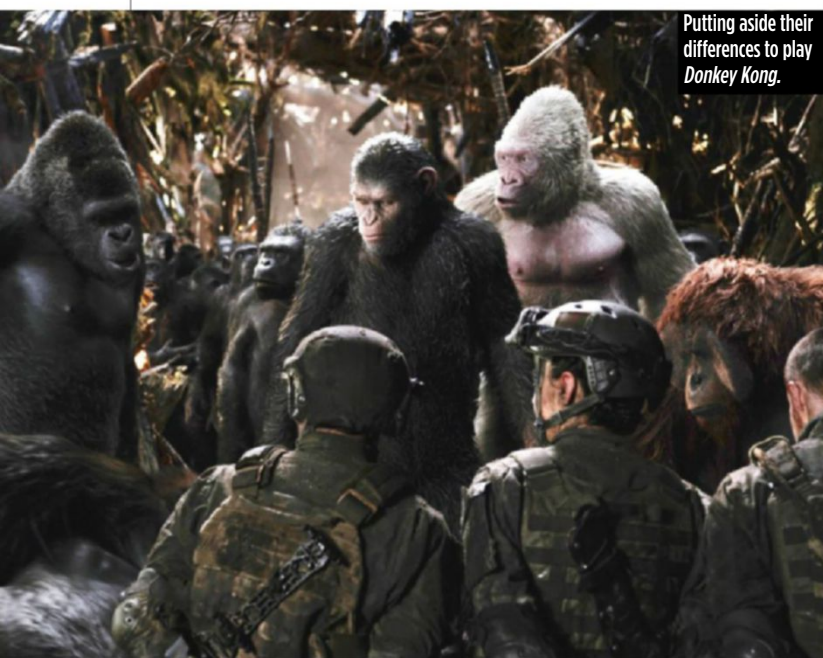
▶ Cast **Adam West, Burt Ward, William Shatner, Julie Newmar**

◆ **Two-Face was a striking** absence from the rogue's gallery of the 1966 *Batman* TV series. The disfigured duplicity-merchant boasted more comic book appearances than fellow reprobate the Riddler, but was deemed too fugly for primetime.

This new animated movie belatedly fixes that omission, enlisting none other than William Shatner in the role. That makes for a tingly piece of pop-culture synthesis, especially as Shatner's voicing a likeness that's clearly himself in his Kirkian prime. He's great, of course: suave and bassy as Harvey Dent, demonically raspy as his askew alter-ego.

Studded with guest shots and littered with in-jokes, it's all played marginally straighter than last year's *Return Of The Caped Crusaders*, dialling down the knowing meta-commentary in favour of pure comic book momentum (though Burt Ward yelling “Batman! Look at the size of those balls!” pushes the wink-wink-factor to breaking point). Energised, witty and clearly made with love, this is a fitting Bat-finale for Adam West's Bright Knight.

◆ **Extras** “The Wonderful World Of Burt Ward”, a featurette spotlighting the former Boy Wonder; an Adam West tribute panel from 2017's San Diego Comic-Con; interviews with Burt Ward and Julie Newmar. **Nick Setchfield**



Putting aside their differences to play Donkey Kong.



"Who stole my false teeth?!"



## IT COMES AT NIGHT

In sickness and in health

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD/download

▶ Director Trey Edward Shults

▶ Cast Joel Edgerton, Christopher Abbott, Carmen Ejogo, Riley Keough

❖ **This downbeat psychological thriller** is the sort of horror film lauded by people who are a bit snobby about horror – not that that's the fault of promising young director Trey Edward Shults.

Set after a mysterious, unspecified outbreak, it focuses on a family of three – father, mother, 17-year-old son – living out in the woods, boarded up in the grandfather's old house. When a man breaks in looking for supplies for his own family, they reluctantly invite them to share the house. But can the newcomers be trusted?

A tightly-wound, claustrophobic piece which unfolds largely in

scenic gloom, it's handsomely mounted, heavy with portentous slow zooms into Kubrickian symmetrical compositions. As it poses the question "What are you willing to do to protect your loved ones?", its character motivations are credible, and performances excellent all round.

But plot-wise it doesn't break new ground: if you've seen a handful of episodes of *The Walking Dead*, you've seen this kind of struggle between survival and decency dramatised before. Indeed, George Romero's *Dead* movies were grubbing around in the same dark corners of the human psyche decades ago.

❖ **Extras** Director's commentary and a half-hour Making Of.

Ian Berriman

i The goat featured briefly in the film is the same "animal actor" used for Black Phillip in Robert Eggers' *The Witch*.

## TRANSFORMERS: THE LAST KNIGHT

You just can't get the staff

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2017 | 12 | Blu-ray (4K/3K/standard)/DVD/VOD

▶ Director Michael Bay

▶ Cast Mark Wahlberg, Laura Haddock, Josh Duhamel, Stanley Tucci

❖ **Much was made of Michael Bay's** decision to bring in a team of scribes to oversee *Transformers 5's* new mythology – Bay couldn't go two interviews without mentioning his writers' room, a franchise first. Sadly, their main contribution to the series is to prove the ancient adage "Too many cooks spoil the CGI boom-fest".

We *think* it's about a magic staff gifted to humanity in the fifth

century, which is still causing trouble in the 21st, but the script's so overcomplicated by 20 writers having their own plots (evil Optimus, Megatron's Suicide Squad, Cuba, the return of Cybertron, Transformers throughout history, whatever Mark Wahlberg is doing, a post-apocalyptic kid, Dinobot babies, Star Wars references, bringing more women into the franchise without really giving them anything to do) that it's hard to tell.

It's not just the script that's problematic – this is the most incoherently shot *Transformers* movie yet, with truly bizarre aspect ratio juggling, shifting between *three* widths, frequently

Robot Wars got a huge budget increase.



in the same scene. It's so nonsensical it feels like sabotage.

❖ **Extras** The extras attempt to explain what's going on, with a 20-minute look at the historical mythology (which completely breaks the previous canon of the other films in the series, but whatever) as well as briefer glimpses at Cybertron and individual characters/sets.

Add what appears to be a military recruitment ad, a lengthy look at filming in the UK, and a funny montage of Bay in action on set, and it's a decent disc.

Shame all we really wanted was an apology, and a promise to never do it again. **Sam Ashurst**

i Steve Buscemi joins John Goodman and John Turturro in the franchise, essentially making it a *Big Lebowski* reunion.





Westworld has its fans.

## DRINKING GAME

Knock back a beverage of your choice every time...

- 🍷 The player piano breaks into a contemporary song.
- 🍷 We see a Host – whether human or animal – being created or repaired.
- 🍷 James Marsden's Teddy dies. They killed Teddy! You bastards!
- 🍷 A Host is told to go into “analysis mode” and ditches their accent.
- 🍷 Someone fiddles with an iPad-like device to change a Host's settings.
- 🍷 Someone refers to the Maze.
- 🍷 Maeve calls someone “darling”.

# WESTWORLD Season One

## Gunsmoke and mirrors

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | 15 | 4k Blu-ray/Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Creators Jonathan Nolan, Lisa Joy

▶ Cast Anthony Hopkins, Evan Rachel Wood, Jeffrey Wright, James Marsden, Thandie Newton, Ed Harris

🔹 **With HBO casting about for** something to fill the void when *Game Of Thrones* eventually wraps up, a philosophical reboot of a '70s Michael Crichton technopotboiler might not seem the logical choice. Yet in the hands of *Person Of Interest*'s Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy (a veteran of *Pushing Daisies*), *Westworld* is a fascinating exploration of man's inherent cruelty.

Beautifully shot, it's a series worth watching and dissecting.

Its attention to Western detail is without question – no greenscreen soundstages for its vistas, captured in the sorts of places John Ford once shot. The cast is uniformly excellent, chewing through dialogue that switches between cowboy drawls and robotic English (for the Hosts) and a blend of wonder and snark (the humans) with poise and skill. Of particular note are Evan Rachel Wood, who juggles a complicated role and real emotion; Jeffrey Wright, typically great as conflicted techie Bernard; and Thandie Newton as Maeve, who's far from the basic saloon madam she appears at first glance. Anthony Hopkins, meanwhile, is both mysterious and mercurial as Dr Robert Ford, one of the big brains behind the place, with Ed

Harris all growly menace as the mysterious Man In Black. The setting allows the storytellers to kill some of their characters with abandon, though they always make the experience count, adding layers to the narrative each time. Plus, while *Thrones* prefers to keep its themes in the subtext, this show allows the characters to ponder big ideas out loud.

*Westworld* is by no means perfect; all of that windy hypothesising can grate, even when someone as accomplished as Hopkins is voicing it. While the show clearly wants to spin mysteries and keep you guessing, a lot of what is to come can be guessed before the big reveal. And for all its forward-thinking attitudes (especially where the

likes of Maeve are concerned), there remain moments of gratuitous violence and nudity.

Yet for the most part, *Westworld* spins a compelling web of ideas and action; though it may never replace *Game Of Thrones* in viewers' affections, hopefully it will get the chance to expound upon them for several seasons to come.

🔹 **Extras** New to this release are a piece which follows the showrunners on set during the first week of filming (11 minutes); a featurette on making the title sequence (13 minutes); and another on the use of the player piano (eight minutes); plus the 2017 Comic-Con panel and a short gag reel. Another two featurettes are carried over from the previous digital release – as are a bunch of online promos, including seven “The Big Moment” featurettes, focusing on particular scenes.

**James White**

**i** The park's central hub, Sweetwater, is named after a key location in Sergio Leone western *Once Upon A Time In The West*.



# PUT A PAUSE IN YOUR DAY

With so many demands from work, home and family, there never seem to be enough hours in the day for you. Why not press pause once in a while, curl up with your favourite magazine and put a little oasis of 'you' in your day.



**PRESS PAUSE**  
ENJOY A MAGAZINE MOMENT

To find out more about Press Pause, visit:  
**[pauseyourday.co.uk](http://pauseyourday.co.uk)**



## HAMMER HORROR

Vampires, mummies, maniacs and more

### ▶ RELEASED OUT NOW!

1963-1971 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Directors Various

▶ Cast Tallulah Bankhead, Peter Cushing, Christopher Lee, Valerie Leon, Kerwin Mathews, Dennis Waterman

### BLU-RAY DEBUT Hammer Films

completists may be staying in and eating beans on toast this month once they've splurged on Blu-rays of eight of the studio's movies.

Powerhouse Films box set *Hammer Volume One: Fear Warning* (★★★★) combines four mid-'60s releases. Reuniting Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee with *Dracula* director Terence Fisher, 1964's *The Gorgon* introduces a new monster to the Hammer canon. Romantic and talky, it ultimately falls flat. With its immobile serpentine hair, the titular threat is unimpressive. And

with two women to choose from, guessing who's transforming, werewolf-like, into the Gorgon ain't exactly a challenge. Deeply trad, *The Curse Of The Mummy's Tomb* (1964) is enlivened by an entertaining performance from Fred Clark as a PT Barnum-style American showman, a bonkers twist ending, and a gasp-inducing moment where the bandaged avenger crushes a supplicant's skull with a single stamp.

You also get examples of two other Hammer templates. Set in Provence, *Maniac* (1963) is one of *Dracula* writer Jimmy Sangster's many riffs on French thriller *Les Diaboliques*. The plotting is preposterous, but attractive location work compensates. And *Fanatic* (1965) does for Tallulah Bankhead what *The Nanny* did for Bette Davis – let an ageing

Hollywood star off the leash. Starting off as black comedy, it snowballs disturbingly, with Bankhead gloriously OTT as a Bible-basher who locks up her dead son's "sinful" ex.

StudioCanal, meanwhile, has released four titles; they include *Demons Of The Mind* and *Fear In The Night*, but it's the gothic horrors that concern us. Featuring face-chewing bats, red-hot poker torture and a brutal stabbing, *Scars Of Dracula* (★★★★) is the goriest of Hammer's seven outings for the vamp. It's a rote affair, but after three films where he did little more than point and hiss, it's pleasing to see Lee playing a more urbane, talkative Dracula.

Finally, *Blood From The Mummy's Tomb* (★★★★) adapts Bram Stoker novel *The Jewel Of Seven Stars*. A mummy-less mummy movie, it sees an Egyptologist's daughter possessed by an evil queen. Composed more imaginatively than your average Hammer and featuring purple dialogue, it's a little confusing, but deserves credit for trying something different. And star Valerie Leon's statuesque beauty has the awe-inspiring impact of a million-dollar special effect.

▶ **Extras** *Scars* and *Blood* (★★★★) come with short retrospectives featuring the usual Hammer mavens, along with Valerie Leon and *Scars* star Jenny Hanley. All four films in the *Fear Warning* box set (★★★★) get similar treatment, plus "Hammer's Women" featurettes focusing on a specific star – kudos to Powerhouse for enlisting female horror experts to front these – interviews, galleries and trailers. Other treats include commentary on *The Gorgon*, an appreciation of it by Garth Marenghi's Matthew Holness, and a short Super-8 version of *Blood*. **Ian Berriman**

**i** During the muted flashbacks in *Curse*, lip-readers may notice Ra-Antef calling on a god to help Tottenham Hotspur!



## THE LURE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

### ▶ RELEASED OUT NOW!

2015 | 15 | Blu-ray

▶ Director Agnieszka Smoczyńska

▶ Cast Marta Mazurek, Michalina Olszanska, Kinga Preis, Andrzej Konopka

**Not all beautiful girls are** sweet-natured, and not all mermaids stay in the sea. In her feature debut, Polish director Agnieszka Smoczyńska transports the *Little Mermaid* fairytale to the 1980s, where two sisters called Golden (Michalina Olszanska) and Silver (Marta Mazurek) emerge from the ocean, drawn to the lights of a small-town strip club. While one sister falls in love with a musician, the other feasts upon the hearts of men.

Forget shell bras and fish companions. Smoczyńska's mermaids aren't storybook princesses, but waxen, half-feral creatures with slick, grey-scaled tails. One memorable scene sees Golden slither down the beach with a sickening squelch, a fresh heart in her mouth. And while there are flirty scenes of girls dancing and enough body horror to please a glutton, the film is really an allegory about objectifying young women.

A fairytale horror musical will sound like a nightmare for some, but there's so much here to relish. We just have one niggle: there's no explanation for why mermaids drink the blood of men, and we want to know much more!

▶ **Extras** A Making Of, featuring interviews with the director, lead actors, screenwriter, composers, sound designer and choreographer; deleted scenes; two short films; an essay by novelist Angela Lovell; trailer. **Kimberley Ballard**



His pinkeye was off the chart.





Nosferatu was looking a bit pudgy these days.

## DESPICABLE ME 3

Gru, Dru and Minions too

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2017 | U | Blu-ray (4K/3D/standard)/DVD/download

▶ Directors Kyle Balda, Pierre Coffin, Eric Guillon

▶ Cast Steve Carell, Kristen Wiig, Trey Parker, Miranda Cosgrove

❖ **Your view of the *Despicable Me* films** will often come down to what you think of the Minions – adorable bumbling sidekicks, or irritating meme-generators? If it's the latter, don't worry, as there's surprisingly little of them in this third film. If it's the former you'll likely find their rendition of "I Am The Very Model Of A Modern Major-General" the highlight.

After gaining three daughters in the first film and a wife in part two, Gru gets a twin brother. The villain is the brilliantly OTT, '80s-inspired Balthazar Bratt (Trey Parker).

It's a retread of the themes we've seen throughout the series: the importance of family, the obsessive bad guy, the hilarious (maybe) Minion antics, and while they're all starting to feel a little tired it's still plenty of fun. It's a shame the girls and Lucy take a bit of a back seat, though, with B-plots about unicorns and Lucy's issues with parenting feeling disconnected from the "real" story about Dru and Bratt.

❖ **Extras** Mini-movie "The Secret Life Of Kyle" (four minutes); deleted scene; "Minion moments"; character profiles; Making Of (seven minutes); "Developing Dru" piece; Anti-Villain League briefing; Freedonia visitors' guide; three infomercials; music video; sing-along video. **Rhian Drinkwater**

**i** Margo's shirt has a picture of the Grinch on it – a reference to Illumination's upcoming *How The Grinch Stole Christmas*.



## THE IRON ROSE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1973 | 15 | Blu-ray

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** Lacking his usual sexy vampires, this effort by cult French director Jean Rollin has an improvisatory feeling. Inspired by an incident while location scouting, it follows two lovers trapped in a cemetery, unable to find the exit (shades of Buñuel's *The Exterminating Angel*).

Featuring surrealist touches (like a circus clown mourner), gnomonic dialogue and much canoodling in crypts, it's by turns poetic and erotic, boring and baffling. Quintessentially Rollin.

❖ **Extras** Trailers. **Ian Berriman**



## WILLARD

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1971 | 15 | Blu-ray

❖ **X-Men's Bruce Davison** stars in this story of a mummy's boy who develops a bond with wild rats, ultimately using them to wreak revenge...

More restrained than you might expect, it's more of a character piece than a horror, with Davison inspiring empathy as the put-upon Willard. And while the rat attacks – which feature well-groomed rodents being tossed by stage-hands – are comical, it never achieves "camp classic" critical mass.

❖ **Extras** Davison commentary and interview; trailers; gallery.

**Ian Berriman**



## JD'S REVENGE

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1976 | 18 | Blu-ray & DVD

(dual format)

❖ **The most dated part of this** blaxploitation riff on *Jekyll & Hyde* isn't the giant collars, but a character saying that a woman respects a man who "goes upside of her head".

A step up from *Dr Black, Mr Hyde* (not hard), it sees a law student taken over by a '40s hustler's spirit. The more complete his transformation into the maniacal JD becomes, the more entertaining it gets – though a grim attempted rape scene leaves a bad taste.

❖ **Extras** Making Of; interview; gallery; trailers. **Ian Berriman**



## NAILS

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2017 | 15 | DVD/VOD/download

❖ **The ghost of a child-murderer** haunts a run-down Irish hospital in Dennis Bartok's debut shocker.

Shauna MacDonald is both strong and sympathetic as an athlete recovering from a hit-and-run accident, who slowly pieces together the nature of the supernatural mystery. Unfortunately, as soon as Nails himself appears the film devolves into a string of spook attacks. Main characters are forgotten about, and the final act is embarrassing.

❖ **Extras** Making Of; trailer.

**Will Salmon**





Not the best way to remember your shopping list.

## YOUR NAME

### Star-crossed lovers

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

2016 | 12 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director Makoto Shinkai

▶ Cast Kana Hanazawa, Etsuko Ichihara, Ryunosuke Kamiki, Mone Kamishiraishi

**The body swap is a classic set-up**, one that's often played for slapstick and laughs. Think *Freaky Friday* or *It's A Boy Girl Thing*. This anime has the potential to be just as frothy, but director Makoto Shinkai subverts expectations, using the body-swap template to create a story that brims with longing and dreamy imagery.

Following a mysterious meteor shower, two teenagers – small-town girl Mitsuha and city boy Taki – start swapping bodies three times a week. There are moments played for laughs, and it's easy to giggle along as Mitsuha and Taki get to grips with becoming the

opposite gender while reluctantly getting to know each other. But Shinkai also explores the heartache of being so young. Mitsuha and Taki's gangly awkwardness will ring true for many viewers, and so will their acute yearning to belong.

At times the charm can judder to a halt – the soundtrack has a tendency to spill over into blaring indie pop, and a few under-the-skirt panty shots feel a bit icky. But it's a film that'll make you laugh, then make you ache – and that's quite an achievement.

▶ **Extras** A Japanese TV piece promoting the film, including snippets of interviews with the director and cast (22 minutes); a look at Makoto Shinkai's previous films (11 minutes); trailers and Japanese promos. **Kimberley Ballard**

**i** Your Name is the highest-grossing anime film of all time, even surpassing Hayao Miyazaki's *Spirited Away*.

## THE THING

### Polar disorder



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

(Out 20 November on Standard Edition)

1982 | 18 | Blu-ray (Limited Edition/Steelbook/Standard Edition)

▶ Director John Carpenter

▶ Cast Kurt Russell, A Wilford Brimley, TK Carter, David Clennon

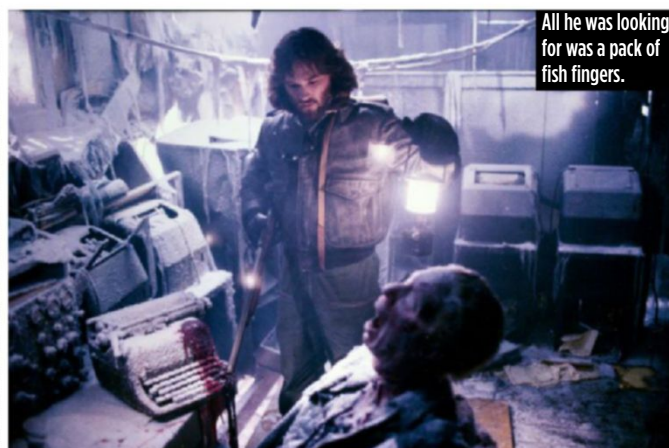
▶ **That glowy-fingered git ET's** probably to blame. Unleashed two weeks after Spielberg's family-friendly fuzzies, it's perhaps no wonder *The Thing* – with its shapeshifting entities, gag-inducing autopsies and doom-laden atmosphere – tanked at the box office.

Returning to the story that inspired 1951 classic *The Thing From Another World* (a fave of John Carpenter) but making use of technical advances to produce a more faithful adaptation, its tale of *Body Snatchers*-style paranoia at an

Antarctic outpost grips like a vice. All 12 main characters feel authentic and distinct, with Kurt Russell cooler than the ambient temperature as sardonic chopper pilot MacReady.

But the real stars of the show are Rob Bottin's practical effects. A macabre meld of Hieronymus Bosch, the Chapman Brothers and what happens when you take the brown acid, their perverse blossomings of flesh still take your breath away.

▶ **Extras** This pristine restoration – made in collaboration with John Carpenter – comes with significant new bonuses; they feel a little redundant, though, given that previous releases weren't ill-served, and have their extras ported over. New doc *Who Goes There* (78 minutes) provides a solid overview, but the absence of Carpenter, Russell and Bottin



All he was looking for was a pack of fish fingers.

makes it inferior to 1998's *Terror Takes Shape* (84 minutes) – though, it does score over its predecessor by dedicating 25 minutes to the short story and original film. Similarly, while a new commentary is welcome, why would you listen to podcast bros explaining why *The Thing* is cool when you could listen to the old Carpenter/Russell track, crammed with anecdotes? Also new: a pointless featurette on the other movies of summer 1982 (27

minutes); a 2017 convention panel (55 minutes); interviews with two super-fans (21 minutes); a short homage from 2011 (six minutes). A "production archive" with scores of deleted scenes and blue-screen footage is also carried over from DVD. The Limited Edition comes with eight lobby cards, a longer booklet and a poster. **Ian Berriman**

**i** The scene where Dr Copper has his arms cut off features a double amputee wearing a prosthetic mask of the actor's face.





## STREET TRASH

★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

1987 | 18 | Blu-ray/DVD

▶ Director James Muro

▶ Cast Mike Lackey, Jane Arakawa, Bill Chepil, Vic Noto

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** This '80s

gross-out horror-comedy takes an "offend-all-comers" approach to its humour, but is only sporadically enjoyable.

The owner of an off-licence finds a crate of decades-old booze called Viper. He sells it at a buck a bottle to his destitute clientele who, when they drink it, dissolve into rainbow-coloured puddles of grue.

There's a real sense of misanthropy here. This is a film that openly laughs at the homeless, alcoholics and the poor – as well as at everyone else. At times, like when the film touches on one character's Vietnam War past, it feels like *Street Trash* is reaching for a satirical point it can't fully express because it's too busy playing catch with a severed cock. The rest of the time it's just a grim, almost plot-less slog.

On the plus side, the melty special effects are brilliant – inventive and colourfully gross, they're funnier than any of the film's actual jokes.

▶ **Extras** *The Meltdown* *Memoirs* is a terrific, feature-length Making Of. Packed with behind-the-scenes footage and candid interviews, it's fascinating even for *Street Trash* sceptics. Director James Muro provides commentary. The package also includes Muro's original 16mm student film, interviews with writer Roy Frumkes and actress Jane Arakawa, deleted scenes and a pair of trailers. **Will Salmon**



Sometimes a glass and some paper just won't do.

## THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN

Size matters



★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★★★

▶ **RELEASED 13 NOVEMBER**

1957 | PG | Blu-ray

▶ Director Jack Arnold

▶ Cast Grant Williams, Randy Stuart, April Kent, Paul Langton

**BLU-RAY DEBUT** An ominous white cloud swells behind the title credits of *The Incredible Shrinking Man*. It's there on the horizon as this "strange, almost unbelievable story" begins, far out to sea but moving at speed, Atomic Age fear made tangible for all its billowing, spectral insubstantiality. This is a Universal horror but the old horrors are gone, entombed in the time before Oppenheimer's calculations. Science – capricious, amoral – is the new, infinitely more terrifying monster.

Adapted by genre king Richard Matheson from his own novel, this is a film that sweats a uniquely '50s paranoia. The carnival-tent title sells the high concept: that mysterious cloud delivers a "deadly chemical reversal of the growth process" on everyman

protagonist Scott Carey. Soon our downsized hero is battling for survival in "a basement universe", wielding a needle against a spider.

The effects still impress, an inventive blend of split-screen, trick angles and oversized props. But it's the doomy, existential tone that makes this a classic. Literally losing status in a post-war land of plenty, the Shrinking Man becomes so small he slips through the cracks of the American Dream itself.

▶ **Extras** An erudite, informed audio commentary by fantasy film historian Tim Lucas; "Auteur On The Campus: Jack Arnold At Universal": an extended, well-researched documentary; "There Is No Zero: Writing *The Shrinking Man*": an in-depth conversation with Richard Christian Matheson, son of the writer; a Super 8 version: yes, relive Arnold's masterpiece in living-room-o-vision; trailer and teaser trailer. **Nick Setchfield**

**i** Matheson wrote an unmade sequel called *The Fantastic Shrinking Girl*, with Carey's wife going on a rescue mission.

## (ROUND UP)



More like the *Hellblazer* comics than season one, but also less fun.

**PREACHER** SEASON TWO

(13 November, Blu-ray/DVD) moves to New Orleans, where Jesse, Cassidy and Tulip search for God but find an ancient conspiracy and a fruitloop Jesus instead. There are loads of brilliant ideas, bizarre set-pieces and gross humour but a sluggish arc plot means it's less than the sum of its parts. Making its high-def debut: British studio Amicus's second anthology horror. The scenarios of 1967's

**TORTURE GARDEN**

(out now, Blu-ray) include a killer piano, a man hypnotised into killing by an evil cat, and an Edgar Allan Poe collector (Peter Cushing) who's collected *Poe himself*... We said: "An entertaining mix of the ludicrous and the macabre, this is a ghost train ride of a movie." Making a rapid transition from cinemas to disc,

Russian film **ZOOLOGY**

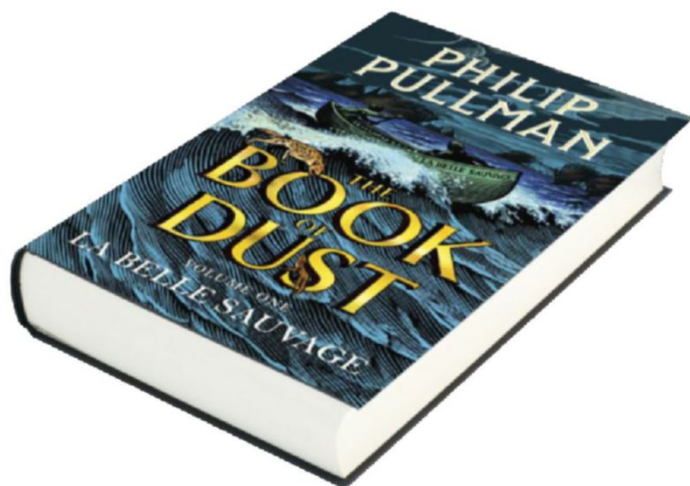
(out now, Blu-ray/DVD) sees a woman in her fifties blossoming in self-confidence after suddenly growing a fleshy, arm-length tail! We said: "Low on plot, high on gloomy atmosphere and utterly engrossing..."

Natalya Pavlenkova gives a tremendous performance." Finally, familiar faces like Eve Myles and Freema Agyeman feature in British horror-comedy **EAT**

**LOCALS** (out now, Blu-ray/DVD). The

directorial debut of *Lock Stock's* Jason Flemyng, it sees a vampire coven and a band of mercenary vampire hunters coming together at a remote farmhouse. We said: "A slick, likeable and oddly genial film that occasionally raises a proper laugh."





## LA BELLE SAUVAGE

New Pullman Material-ises



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

560 pages | Hardback/  
ebook/audiobook

► Author Philip Pullman

► Publisher David Fickling Books

◉ **Young Lyra Belacqua** and her shape-shifting dæmon Pantalaimon were almost as much of a publishing sensation as Harry Potter back in the day – the “day” in question being spread across 1995 to 2000, with the release of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Global acclaim, extraordinary sales (around 4.5 million copies by 2015) and a successful play followed. Hollywood even came knocking in 2007: although the end result, *The Golden Compass*, was a muddled rush job (cool talking polar bear, mind).

Philip Pullman wasn't finished with the world he created. While penning a few more associated books (such as 2003's *Lyra's Oxford*), he also teased fans with the promise of another epic trilogy. After 17 years, it's finally here, kicking off with a prequel,

set 10 years before *Northern Lights*, whose two follow-ups will take place *after* Lyra's original trilogy of adventures. Obviously the big question is whether Volume One of *The Book Of Dust* (named after a canoe and not Lyra, as you might suspect) is worth the wait. The answer is yes... but with some reservations.

The story follows Malcolm, an affable 11-year-old living and working in his parents' pub in a bucolic alternate-universe version of Oxford. Along with his dæmon, Asta, he listens in on professors as they talk about their subjects, is good friends with his teachers and visits the nuns in the nearby priory. Pullman has such a talent for creating living, breathing characters that within the space of just a few chapters Malcolm feels like someone you've known all your life – he's a creation every inch as compelling as Lyra.

Speaking of our future heroine, she's only six months old here and already causing trouble. Having been handed to the nuns by her uninterested mother, it soon

transpires that the baby is the centre of a witch-prophecy, and so both Lyra's father, Lord Asriel, and Mrs Coulter start circling again. It seems everybody wants the kid, including a mysterious madman with a hyena dæmon – a creation of pure psychological terror.

It's undoubtedly a delight to read more of this world, in which people have animal-soul friends, and there are some tantalising discussions surrounding Dust, the enigmatic substance that drives the first three novels. But, sadly, there are some issues. As enjoyable as it is to bumble around with Malcolm for the book's first half, the plot – which involves a biblical flood – takes forever to arrive. When it does, the fact that Pullman has structured it to follow 16th-century epic poem *The Faerie Queene* is discombobulating. Its surreal elements do work, but they don't feel connected to the rest of

“Malcolm is every bit as compelling as Lyra”

the book – leaving you feeling as adrift as the book's heroes in their canoe.

Then there's the fact that some characters, such as friendly academic Hannah Relf, disappear with no explanation. They may pop up in the sequels as older versions of themselves (indeed, Hannah does), but it's irritating when the book simply abandons their narration without a second thought. The finale, too, feels rushed and ungratifying. Another chapter or two might have helped fix this, as well as wrapping up some other loose ends.

There's no doubt, however, that *La Belle Sauvage* is a must-read whether you're a fan of the first series or a newbie. Pullman's imagination is a treasure, pure and simple – and even as babies, Lyra and Pan are irresistible. Roll on Volume Two. **Jayne Nelson**

**i** Nur Huda el-Wahabi, a 15-year-old victim of the Grenfell Tower fire, will have a character named after her in Volume Two.



## STRANGE WEATHER



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

434 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Joe Hill

► Publisher Gollancz

◉ **In the age of the word** processor, more is more when it comes to novels. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but there are days when, as a reader, you yearn for the kind of short-sharp-shock fiction that you can read quickly.

Enter Joe Hill, who, after doing the big-novel-exploring-big-ideas thing himself with end-of-the-world tale *The Fireman*, has now gone in the other direction with a collection of four short novels written, according to an afterword, “in longhand over the course of four years”. The short novel, says Hill, is a form he likes because it's “all killer, no filler”.

So does Hill succeed in writing murderous prose? Almost. It's only in the last 20 or so pages of “Snapshot”, where Hill seems to sketch out the novel he might have written as a way to finish his tale of a kid who finds an eldritch camera that steals memories, that standards slip. In this case, the tale might better have been left as a short story.

But even so, you keep reading, just as you do with the other tales here: “Loaded”, an exploration of what it means to be a gun owner; the eco-parable “Rain”; and the hallucinatory “Aloft”, the tale of a parachutist and a strange cloud formation. A disparate bunch, but what unites them is a *Twilight Zone*-like combination of crispness and creepiness. Mostlly killer. **Jonathan Wright**





## GNOMON

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

704 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Nick Harkaway

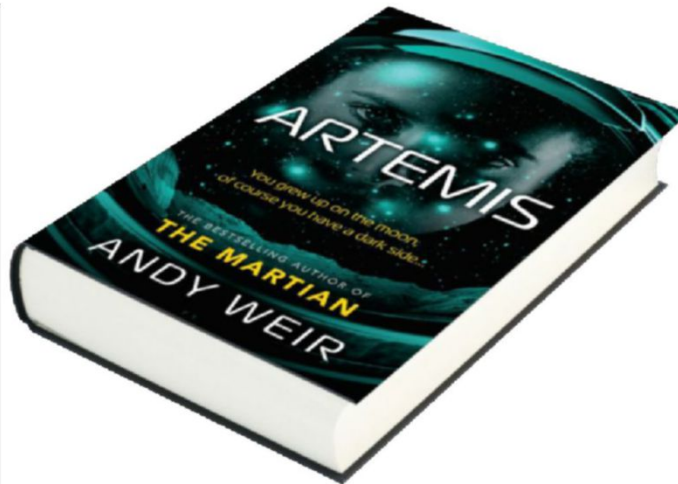
► Publisher William Heinemann

❖ **A warning about what may lie immediately ahead,** Nick Harkaway's fourth novel is a vast and sprawling state-of-the-nation address from a man who's clearly cross about the creep of surveillance into our society. It's to Harkaway's immense credit that it's simultaneously a fiendishly plotted, multi-layered, cyberpunk-tinged whodunit that rarely lets up from the first page.

It centres on Mielikki Neith, an investigator charged with finding out how a cult writer, Diana Hunter, came to die in custody. In a near-future Britain where the System knows everything, this shouldn't be too much of a problem. But as she opens records of Hunter's interrogation that should offer the author's perspective on events, Neith finds the memories of four minds that cannot possibly exist. Here's a banker who's being chased down by a number-crunching shark. Here's an artist who's been working on a videogame. Here's a killer. Here's an alchemist who's trying to resurrect the dead.

If these narratives don't quite come together seamlessly, it doesn't matter. This is a novel of energy and huge ambition. Harkaway will write technically more accomplished books in the future, but he'll do so precisely because he cut loose here and took so many risks. A novel that confirms the emergence of a major talent.

Jonathan Wright



## ARTEMIS

### Bad Moon Rising

★★★★★

► RELEASED 14 NOVEMBER

304 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Andy Weir

► Publisher Del Rey

❖ **As killer set-ups go,** Andy Weir's debut novel *The Martian* had an absolute belter, stranding its protagonist on Mars with no apparent hope of rescue within the first few pages. Having already delivered a compelling, accessible work of science fiction, Weir is now having a second try with his new novel – only this time, the results aren't quite as successful.

At least *Artemis* isn't simply a carbon-copy of *The Martian*, instead trying to be a futuristic tale of low-level criminality. It's the story of Jazz Bashara, an aimless twentysomething who lives in Artemis, the first city on the Moon. She wants a better life, and is trying to get one via a career in smuggling, but when she agrees to pull off a dangerous score it pitches

“Weir is playing in a familiar SF sandbox”

her into a conspiracy between gangsters and corporations that threatens the entire city.

Weir's handling of the story is pacy and controlled, and again showcases his extensive scientific research, with plenty of sequences revolving around the specifics of physics and chemistry. The central plotline twists and turns in a satisfying manner, and a climactic race-against-the-clock sequence is suitably tense, but the wobbly characterisation and occasionally clunky prose show Weir hasn't remedied some of the flaws that were present in *The Martian*.

While Jazz is an intriguing protagonist, her wisecracking persona gets increasingly grating. Adding to this, Weir is brilliant at the small details, but less convincing at some of the broader strokes of his Moon-based society. He's also playing in a more familiar SF sandbox here, and it's one that authors like James SA Corey and Ian McDonald have pulled off much better in recent years. Mainstream thriller readers may find *Artemis* fresh and surprising, but dedicated sci-fi fans are more likely to be a little disappointed. **Saxon Bullock**

**i** Weir's second book was originally going to be a crazier hard-SF novel called *Zhek*, but it was only partially completed.



## OTHERWORLD

★★★★★

► RELEASED OUT NOW!

368 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Authors Jason Segel, Kirsten Miller

► Publisher Rock The Boat

❖ **Virtual reality game** *Otherworld* is so addictive its players never want to stop. Not to go to work. Not to go to school. It's so addictive that players don't want to have to stop to eat, or even to go to the toilet. And thanks to an experimental new peripheral designed by the obnoxiously named Company, some of them might not be able to. When delinquent teen Simon realises his best friend Kat is trapped inside the game, he logs on to save her – but he discovers this game is deadly, both in *Otherworld* and IRL.

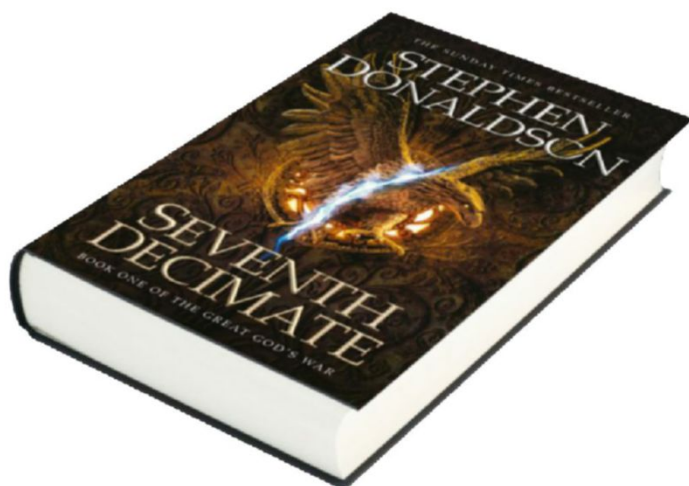
Co-authors Kirsten Miller and Jason Segel (yes, that Jason Segel, the one in *How I Met Your Mother*) clearly know their way around games and gaming culture, because *Otherworld* feels like something people might really want to play. It's endlessly imaginative, and deeply scary. Main character Simon feels real, too: he's not all that likeable when you're first introduced, but watching his self-centred carelessness slowly evolve into something nobler over the course of the novel feels compelling.

With any luck, that'll mean *Otherworld's* other characters get a bit more attention in the upcoming sequel, too, because what we get of them here isn't quite satisfying. Still, if you wanted to like *Ready Player One* when it came out, but found its endless pop culture references grating, this is probably the book you were hoping for.

Sarah Dobbs



## BOOKS



## SEVENTH DECIMATE

### Weapons of magic destruction



► **RELEASED 17 NOVEMBER**  
307 pages | Hardback/ebook/audiobook  
► Author **Stephen Donaldson**  
► Publisher **Gollancz**

❖ **There's a fable-like quality to** *Seventh Decimate*. Although the prologue has tinges of modern grimdark, it quickly adopts a folkloric universality. It's not a tale of political intrigue but an old-fashioned quest: one man's progress through the wilderness. Donaldson's influential early series, *The Chronicles Of Thomas Covenant*, is as famous for its page count as for its ornate language. *Seventh Decimate* could be by a different author; with its clarity, brevity and timelessness, it bears a resemblance to *Sir Gawain And The Green Knight*.

This is book one of a new series called *The Great God's War*. The conflict between Amika and Belleger has persisted for generations. Sorcerers on both sides have pounded the countryside with six types of destructive magic – the Decimates

– until, without warning, the Bellegerin Magisters lose their power. With the Amikans now at a clear advantage, Prince Bifalt of Belleger must find the mythical book of the Seventh Decimate.

There's an enduring impression that you're meant to *interpret*. The nation's names; the Cult of the Many who take on the sins of others; the dandy who leads a troupe of performers called the Wide World Carnival; a cynic with a literal scar bisecting his face... Reading *Seventh Decimate* is like being in a fever dream packed with symbols. Although this grants it vibrancy and gravitas, when it comes to the characters you crave more authentic depth: it's difficult to like a protagonist defined by his self-righteous bloody-mindedness. And when we meet the bronze-skinned desert caravanners, or the "savages" with their witch doctor, there's a sense of stereotyping.

Magic as a weapon of mass destruction is a familiar theme in fantasy literature. But if this is a story about the futility of war, it's also about knowledge, and the patronising power wielded by those who own it. It's a little artificial, but told with a masterful vigour. **Dave Bradley**

**i** Donaldson's first novel, *Lord Foul's Bane*, was originally rejected by all 47 major fiction publishers in the US.

“Told with masterful vigour”



## DALEK



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

318 pages | Hardback  
► Authors **George Mann, Justin Richards, Cavan Scott**  
► Publisher **BBC Books**

❖ **Few things are more** soul-crushingly tedious than lengthy descriptions of the synopses of old TV episodes. Fortunately, this is something the writers of this weighty tome are clearly well aware of.

So, while great swathes of *Dalek* are taken up with dry recitations of old plot points, they're interspersed with brief factual sections on such matters as the evolution of pepperpot design, the two Dalek movies, and an interview with voice artist Nicholas Briggs, master of the ring-modulator.

There are also slithers of new fiction: five comic strips and four short stories – all two-pagers. Intriguingly, two of the prose pieces are by veteran script editors for the show. Terrance Dicks offers a glimpse of a downtrodden Davros, before he rose to power. Eric Seward, meanwhile, brings us soft-voiced, empathetic “New Daleks” and baffling satirical jabs at Brexit. This story is sensibly placed right at the back, to prevent you hurling the book across the room before you've finished it.

The imagery is a mixed bag, combining concept art with new CG illustrations. While the latter are occasionally impressive, just as often they inspire a tut, thanks to Dalek casings that look as weirdly not-quite-right as the dodgy Dapol action figures of the late '80s. It's enough to make you want to grate “DO NOT DEVIATE!”

**Calvin Baxter**

## BULLET TIME

### A BOOK IN BULLET POINTS



## THE ART OF HORROR MOVIES

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

256 pages | Hardback  
► Editor **Stephen Jones**  
► Publisher **Applause**

- This companion volume to 2015's *The Art Of Horror* focuses on... well, guess.
- Its nine-part history of scare cinema boasts a pretty impressive contributor list, which includes the likes of Sir Christopher Frayling, Kim Newman and horror novelist Ramsey Campbell.
- Short sections profile important figures like Boris Karloff, Barbara Steele and Vincent Price.
- Printed on glossy paper, it's lavishly illustrated with scores of images of vintage posters (many of them made for international markets).
- Also reproduces original art by the likes of Dave McKean, Graham Humphreys and Les Edwards – most of it originally produced for horror magazines, DVDs and book covers.
- Our favourites, though, are the African and Indian posters for the likes of *The Evil Dead* and *Hellraiser 3*. Some of them are absolutely bonkers!





# Reviews



## THE LOST VILLAGE



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

464 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Neil Spring

► Publisher Quercus

❖ In 1943 the population of Imber, a village in Wiltshire, was evicted by the army, their homes requisitioned to provide an area for troops to exercise. The residents were promised they'd be allowed back in after the war. They never were.

In his second Harry Price novel, Neil Spring visits this rich real-world setting (albeit with a tinkered-with timeline – here Imber was evacuated in 1914, with the bulk of the story taking place in 1930). Price is a debunker of the supernatural. He's fallen out with his former assistant Sarah Grey, but the pair are drawn back together to investigate apparent hauntings in this literal ghost village.

Spring conjures a strong sense of place from Imber that, for the first half, keeps the pages turning. The ominous suggestions of something lingering in the derelict buildings are well-conveyed. But this is a chunky book and as the story increases in complexity it becomes harder to ignore the flaws. The human plot is as vague and implausible as it is macabre, and the dialogue is rarely less than melodramatic, often slipping into cliché. And while Grey talks about Price (also, incidentally, a real person) as an arch manipulator, he doesn't actually get to do very much here – this is very much Sarah's tale, for better and worse. There's the spirit of a fun, mainstream chiller here, but by the end you'll be longing for it to be laid to rest. **Will Salmon**



## THIS MORTAL COIL



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

450 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Emily Suvada

► Publisher Penguin Books

❖ A post-apocalyptic future ravaged by a virus that makes people explode – great concept, right? But that's only the start of *This Mortal Coil*. 400 pages later and Emily Suvada's debut novel has thrown in everything from genetic engineering, mad scientists, subterranean societies and conspiracy theories to super teens, body hacking, uncle Tom Copley and the kitchen sink.

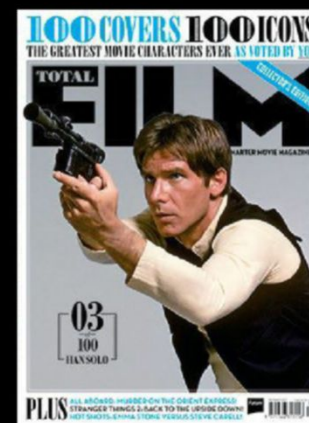
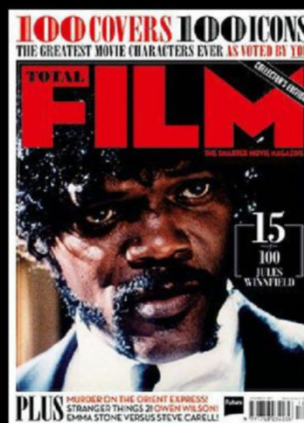
The story is narrated by teenager Catarina Agatta, a surface-dwelling hacker extraordinaire. When not avoiding the poisonous clouds created by exploding Infected, she fights evil corporation Cartaxus. Most people live in virus-free bunkers run by Cartaxus, having given up their right to have non-licensed software in their gene-hacking cyber-implants. Catarina's dad, Lachlan, is a brilliant scientist kidnapped by Cartaxus and forced to work for them. But it seems he's left a vital clue to the cure for the virus in Catarina's genes.

A fast-paced, unashamed page-turner, *This Mortal Coil* is popping with great ideas and entertaining set-pieces, but they're all fighting for space, and there are so many twists that revelation fatigue sets in. And Catarina spends the entire novel bleeding from so many injuries that you feel like a voyeur at an S&M club.

It's certainly a fun read, but it could easily have been three different – less crammed – novels. **Dave Golder**



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## A POCKETFUL OF CROWS

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

233 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author **Joanne M Harris**

► Publisher **Gollancz**

◉ **Twitter might be best** known for political arguments and cat gifs, but there's a thriving strand of creativity there too, tales told in short snippets in a manner akin to the oral storytelling tradition – and Harris's latest book originally began in tweeted form during one such #storytime. Don't let the tale's technological origins fool you, though. This is a folk song-inspired story that feels an age older than its bindings.

The narrator of the story has no name; a girl of the travelling folk, she lives in a hut in the woods and hunts with the wolves and flies with the crows, living entirely apart from the people of the village. Until, that is, she falls in love with the local heir, binds herself to him, is named and then inevitably betrayed – all as we follow her through the months and the seasons of the year.

*Crows* has the lyrical feel of a much older tale – a vintage book you might have read as a child, or taken down from the shelves at the back of an old pub to flick through in front of the fireplace. The early chapters feel frustrating as the narrator gives herself entirely to a man who's certain to abandon her, but as she begins her journey of revenge the reader is pulled along through the seasons with her, captivated and compelled to see where the tale will end, and what will happen to her.

**Rhian Drinkwater**

## THE ART OF HARRY POTTER

### Book Of Charms

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

356 pages | Hardback

► Author **Marc Sumerak**

► Publisher **Titan Books**

◉ **"There's a danger in creating something that's completely fantasy,"** says Academy Award-winning production designer Stuart Craig. "You lose all reference to reality." In transporting *Harry Potter* from page to screen, Craig and his team used this ethos as their foundation, conjuring a magical world rooted in old English romanticism.

Divided into five chapters – "The Wider Wizarding World"; "Wizards, Witches And Muggles"; "Magical Creatures"; "Artifacts"; and "Graphic Art Of The Wizarding World" – this weighty, large-format book makes for a

richly detailed companion. All kinds of concept art have been included, from meticulous production sketches drawn in lines of thick charcoal to oil paintings in luxurious colours.

It's easy to take for granted the amount of work that goes into

building a film world, but when it's laid out like this you can only marvel at the imagination that inks each location. A highlight is the paintings of Andrew Williamson and Adam Brockbank, whose work defined the look of *Harry Potter*'s vast locales, such as the grand lakeside vistas of Hogwarts and the moody gothic interiors of 12 Grimmauld Place.

The minutiae is also amazing, with an entire chapter dedicated to graphic designers Miraphora Mina and Eduardo Lima, who created everything from potion labels to Ministry of Magic documents. Though it's a little too light on commentary, this remains essential reading for all fans of the series. **Kimberley Ballard**



**i** Stuart Craig describes Hogwarts's medieval gothic style as a mix of English university and European cathedral.



CASPER VAN DIEN DOLPH LUNDGREN WILLIAM SHATNER BILLY DEE WILLIAMS DENIS LAWSON  
JOONAS SUOTAMO ZACH GALLIGAN IAN MCDIARMID JENNIFER RUNYON KEN COLLEY  
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## THE POLAR BEAR EXPLORERS' CLUB

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

356 pages | Paperback/ebook

► Author Alex Bell

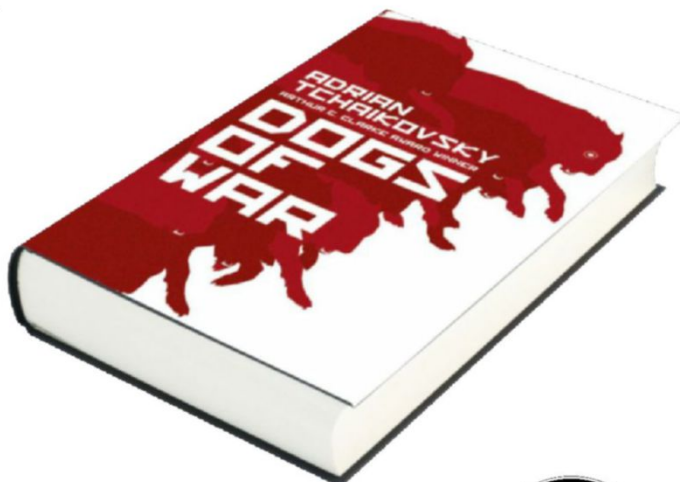
► Publisher Faber & Faber

❖ **Aimed at eight-to-twelve-year-olds**, this could well be the most huggable book of the year. It's ludicrously cute, filled with unicorns who eat iced gems, friendly polar bears and mini T-rexes who like to hold your hand. If that sounds too twee for your tastes, it's also an entertainingly ripping yarn about a young girl, Stella, joining an expedition to the frozen wastes... much to the dismay of the fussy, stiff-upper-lipped gentlemen who run the Polar Bear Explorers' Club.

There's social commentary aplenty, as the Victorian gentlemen (if, indeed, Queen Vic exists in this fantasy world) worry about their moustaches and head off to explore the wilds armed with combs and pocket mirrors. Meanwhile, Stella and her friends – who include a clearly autistic boy; even if the condition isn't named, it's lovely to see it depicted so well here – set off to find the coldest part of the Icelands while dodging everything from gigantic yetis to carnivorous cabbages.

With adorable illustrations by Tomislav Tomic and a joyful, witty tone that channels everything from Lemony Snicket to JK Rowling, *The Polar Bear Explorers' Club* lets itself down a little with a slightly rushed ending. But that's a trifle, really, when the rest of the book is so enchanting. An (iced) gem.

Jayne Nelson



## DOGS OF WAR

Rex Education



★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

400 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Adrian Tchaikovsky

► Publisher Head Of Zeus

❖ **Did you see the movie *Up***, with the dogs who've got collars that enable them to talk? Imagine that, but really brutal and full of commentary about geopolitics, technology and human rights, and you're getting a grasp on *Dogs Of War*. Adrian Tchaikovsky's previous novel, the Clarke Award winner *Children Of Time*, involved a planet colonised by spiders who'd been artificially evolved by humans. *Dogs Of War* tracks this back to a near-future setting, when the science of bio-engineering animals is in its infancy.

Rex is a seven-foot-tall armoured dog with enhanced intelligence, leading a special ops squad consisting of a bear, a snake and a swarm of bees. Rex is in Mexico, fighting a dirty war on

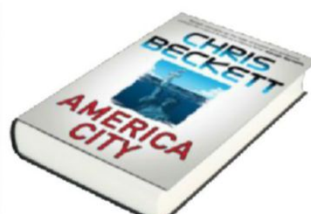
behalf of a private company. He doesn't know if his actions are right or wrong – he just needs his master to tell him he's a Good Dog. However, when the operation is investigated by the UN, Rex finds himself freed and thinking for himself. From here the novel is about what he'll do, and what the world will do with him.

The book moves at great pace, burning through many locations and characters, and the only constant is Rex himself, who narrates about half of it in the first person. This is Tchaikovsky's big gamble – Rex could easily have become a tiresome idiot-savant figure, but instead these narrated sections work brilliantly. Rex's simple perspective brings great clarity, and we feel his struggle as he gradually comes to terms with the moral complexity of his life as a soldier. It's not hard to draw parallels with Rex's desire for simple certainties and how a lot of people think and act – the difference being, Rex has the excuse of being a dog. All this makes the novel thoughtful and emotionally affecting, yet also exciting and unpredictable.

Good Dog! **Eddie Robson**

**i** Also just out, from Tchaikovsky: *Ironclads*, a limited-edition novella about a missing "Scion" – a soldier in a lethal battle suit.

“The book burns through locations and characters”



## AMERICA CITY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

357 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Chris Beckett

► Publisher Corvus Books

❖ **It's a modern cliché that America** is really two countries – but what if one of those “countries” found itself taking refugees from the other?

That's the question Chris Beckett poses in *America City*, set in a 22nd century where climate change is making the southern states and the coasts uninhabitable. Holly, a liberal British publicist, is drafted onto the team of a right-wing politician (who your reviewer couldn't help but picture as Rob Lowe) and his ambitious plan to set America back on its feet.

By comparison with Beckett's acclaimed *Eden* trilogy, the level of science fiction here is minimal. It could easily have been set in a nearer future (and it often feels like a nearer future in terms of technology – though not in terms of the timescale of climate change). Large parts of the book are about the management of a presidential campaign, using tactics similar to those employed now.

At times the novel feels like a series of ruminations on politics, voiced by whichever characters happen to be wandering through the scene at the time. But the author never loses sight of his story, which is compelling: what other agendas are at play, and will Holly emerge with her ideals intact? Beckett lets these questions hang right until the end. It becomes a grim demonstration of how one person can change history, but not control it

**Eddie Robson**





## CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND: THE ULTIMATE VISUAL HISTORY

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

192 pages | Hardback

► Author Michael Klastorin

► Publisher Titan Books

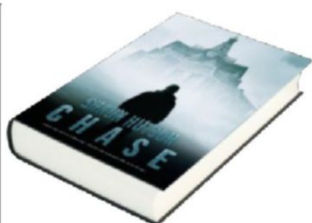
### Forty years on, Steven

Spielberg's fable of first contact earns a meticulously researched, exhaustively illustrated behind-the-scenes book.

Drawing on fresh interviews with key players, Michael Klastorin dissects the movie's journey from inspiration – Spielberg remembers gazing up at the Perseids as a suburbia-bound kid – to celluloid.

We learn of some intriguing slipstream realities along the way: Steve McQueen was first choice for the lead, while Spielberg toyed with the idea of staging the film's awe-drenched climax between two fast food restaurants (would you like some Greys with that?).

The visual material delivers everything from rare on-set photos to pre-production art. A primal take on the alien mothership is an abstract collection of smudges; initial sketches of a long-armed alien visitor look positively demonic. There are loose-leaf pieces of ephemera throughout – telegrams, set plans, transcripts. Frustratingly there's no index for these treasures. But that's a minor quibble. If you've never spotted R2-D2 hitching a ride on the mothership, turn to page 155 and your life will be complete. **Nick Setchfield**



## CHASE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

233 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Shaun Hutson

► Publisher Caffeine Nights

There's no denying it, *Chase* is nasty. It's so violent you expect your hands to be smeared with gore when you inevitably put it to one side because you need a bit of a break from the bleakness. It's so graphic in its depictions of bodily torture, the most appropriate bookmark would be a spinal column. It contains sadism so transgressive it makes *Salo* look like *Solo*: *A Star Wars Story*. Basically, what we're saying is, *Chase* sees Shaun Hutson (author of gruesome fare like *Slugs*) doing what he does best – freaking out even the most hardcore splatter fan.

At first, you think it's about a young British family going on holiday to America. We get to know the sympathetically drawn family – dad David, mum Amy, daughter Daisy – through a series of chapters so intimate and open, it feels like you're sneaking a look at someone's diary.

These chapters are interspersed with the sickest descriptions of torture this side of *Game Of Thrones*, as we're forced to share headspace with a cultist who believes young children must be purged of evil via pain. So: young family, mad cultist – there's only one way this can go, right? Wrong. Hutson throws in a series of bonkers twists that'll keep you on your (severed) toes. It's definitely (definitely!) not for everyone, but Hutson's fans will lap up every last word.

**Sam Ashurst**



## TWIN PEAKS: THE FINAL DOSSIER

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

160 pages | Hardback/ebook

► Author Mark Frost

► Publisher Macmillan

### Last year's *The Secret*

*History Of Twin Peaks* was an elaborate compendium of myth and mystery that knitted UFOlogy, folklore and the occult into the *Peaks* universe. What Mark Frost's book didn't offer, however, was too much insight into what many of the TV characters had been up to in the decades between seasons two and three.

The same can't be said for *The Final Dossier*. Presented as a report by Agent Preston, it expounds on backstories, explains why certain people were absent from *The Return* and gleefully tosses out the odd revelation. How's Annie? You'll find out in chapters that are heavy with three decades' worth of expectation, but still eerie and satisfying.

At times this, along with the loose narrative, makes *The Final Dossier* feel more like an RPG sourcebook than a novel. Frost does a fine job of enriching the myths, but there are moments where Preston's mask slips and you can hear the author's voice, not Chrysta Bell's – notably in a cameo from a certain, much-loathed President. It's also a less lavish volume than its beautiful predecessor.

That doesn't detract from how essential the book is for fans, though. *The Final Dossier* offers reassurance following the show's existentially unsettling final hour, adding context without ruining *Twin Peaks'* sacred ambiguity. **Will Salmon**

## ALSO OUT

It's been a preposterously busy month for book releases! Here's just a few we couldn't fit in. A young woman investigates the sinister Joyous

Congregation of the Smiling God in **IT DEVOURS!** (out now,

Orbit), a new novel from the duo behind podcast *Welcome To Night Vale*. The latest in Kim Newman's *Anno Dracula* series, **ONE THOUSAND**

**MONSTERS** (out now, Titan Books) sees a group of vampires exiled from Britain settling in Tokyo. Short story collection **PREDATOR: IF IT BLEEDS**

(out now, Titan Books) brings together 16 tales of the intergalactic hunters. Featuring rituals and spells from the series, **BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: THE OFFICIAL GRIMOIRE**

(out now, Titan Books) is presented as if it's the journal of Wiccan Willow, complete with "handwritten" diary entries. Unofficial *Stranger Things* cookbook **STRANGER FILLINGS** (out now, Trapeze) includes

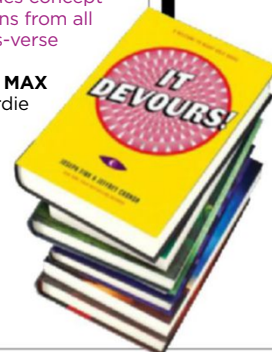
recipes like Demogorgon-Zola Tartlets and the Upside Down Cake! **CINEMAPS** (out now,

Quirk Books) charts the routes of characters in films like *The Shining*, *Back To The Future* and *Guardians Of The Galaxy* via gorgeous art. Illustrated by more than 100 infographics, **THE**

**YEAR OF THE GEEK** (out now, Aurum Press) lists a different sci-fi event (like Batman's debut or the first Comic-Con) for every day of the year. **THE ART OF STAR TREK: THE KELVIN**

**TIMELINE** (out now, Titan Books) includes concept art and designs from all three Abrams-verse films. Finally, **MILLER AND MAX**

(out now, Hardie Grant Books) talks to cast, crew and associates of George Miller to piece together a history of the *Mad Max* movies.





## DARK NIGHTS: METAL

### Bats Out Of Hell



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Scott Snyder**

► Artist **Greg Capullo**

**ISSUES 1-3** **Out of all of DC's**

extensive *New 52* relaunches back in 2011, the one outright success was their new take on the Batman mythology. Helmed by writer Scott Snyder and artist Greg Capullo, the rebooted title delivered an impressive run of Gotham adventures that only came to an end in 2016 with DC's latest (and far more stable) relaunch, *DC Rebirth*.

Now, however, Snyder and Capullo are back for one last hurrah, with a Batman-centric event comic that also involves appearances from the entire cast of the Justice League, and which

once again sees the DC Universe teetering on the edge of total destruction.

It all starts when Bruce Wayne discovers he's potentially at the heart of an aeons-long conspiracy connected to a reality-altering metal and a "Dark Multiverse", a sinister flipside to DC's already-established 52 alternate universes. Unfortunately, Batman's attempts to solve the mystery go terribly wrong, resulting in a catastrophe that replaces him with seven evil alternate versions of Batman, all of whom are soon conquering the world on behalf of their master, a demonic entity called *Barbatos*.

The core six-issue miniseries is the kind of lurid fare that Snyder and Capullo specialise in, embracing comic-book ridiculousness from the start.

In the first three issues Snyder cranks up the pace, pulling off dozens of references to previous Batman sagas – including his own "The Court Of Owls" and "The Return Of Bruce Wayne" by Grant Morrison – and building the story to a universe-shattering crescendo.

There's a gleeful sense of energy and abandon here that's hard to resist, although Snyder hasn't entirely avoided some of the flaws of his previous crossover events, with certain aspects of the story (like the alternate Batmen) acting too much like a set-up for the extensive tie-in issues. It also doesn't help that much of the story was established in the recent *Dark Days* prologue issues "The Forge"

“Batman is replaced with seven evil alternate versions”

and "The Casting", making this feel even less like a properly self-contained and satisfying Batman adventure.

Still, while the sprawl of the story may get a little out of Snyder's control, he does pull off a wild and unpredictable ride that's based around some interesting concepts, and this is matched with typically well-crafted and inventive art from Capullo. It remains to be seen whether the relentless pace and invention of the first half can be maintained, but so far *Metal* is turning out to be the comics equivalent of an extended guitar solo – energetic, intricate and shamelessly loud.

**Saxon Bullock**

**i** Snyder is working on *Batman: Last Knight*, a post-apocalyptic "final" Batman story, with artist Sean Gordon Murphy.



## MARVEL LEGACY



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel Comics**

► Writer **Jason Aaron**

► Artists **Various**

**ONE-SHOT** **The Marvel/DC** rivalry has recently entered a new phase, with Marvel going through a shaky patch while DC is on an upswing thanks to their successful *Rebirth* relaunch. Marvel's latest single-issue special is a sprawling teaser for what's coming in their superhero universe, but also feels like a direct response to last year's *DC Rebirth* special, trying to capture a blend of old-school thrills and fresh shocks.

Unfortunately, while *DC Rebirth* had two attention-grabbing anchors – the return of "Kid Flash" Wally West and the start of a controversial *Watchmen* crossover – *Marvel Legacy* is less focused and lacks any true surprises.

Writer Jason Aaron does his best to string together a series of loosely connected set-pieces that hint at upcoming Marvel storylines, and some are entertaining enough by themselves, especially the debut of a mythical 1,000,000 BC version of the Avengers.

Much of this, however, feels like Marvel going out of their way to reassure ageing comic book fans that all their old favourites are coming back (including, in the least-shocking reveal ever, a resurrection for Wolverine). *Marvel Legacy* isn't without its fun moments, but does give the worrying impression that the House of Ideas is leaning too heavily on nostalgia rather than trying something genuinely new.

**Saxon Bullock**







## SCREAM! & MISTY HALLOWEEN SPECIAL

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Rebellion**

► Writers/artists **Various**

**ONE-SHOT** 2000 **AD** owners

Rebellion revive two much-loved '70s titles in this spooky 52-page special. The anthology format is similar to the *Galaxy's Greatest Comic*, with a twist.

Of most interest to British comics fans will be "Death Man: The Gathering", that sees various vintage characters – the Leopard from *Lime Street*, the Dwarf, *Steel Commando* and more – converge. Unfortunately, it's also the weakest strip in the issue, packing too many faces into a scant few pages.

Much better are returning *Scream!* classics "The Dracula File" (the Prince of Darkness is living in hiding in the present day, and picks on the wrong "helpless" victim), with excellent scratchy art from Tristan Jones, and "The 13th Floor"; the latter sees young Sam Bowers chased by bullies into a sinister tower block, where it transforms from '70s-pastiche monochrome into a swirling, full-colour psychedelic hellscape.

Despite its varied nature, several themes recur. Many of the strips feature Nazis as villains – indeed "The Return Of The Sentinels" vision of hell is a parallel UK of ruthless far-right oppression – while most of the protagonists are downtrodden but plucky working class heroes. Despite its roots in the '70s, this feels like a timely return. **Will Salmon**



## SPIDER-MEN II

Going the extra Miles

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **Marvel Comics**

► Writer **Brian Michael Bendis**

► Artist **Sara Pichelli**

**ISSUES 1-3** **Chronicling the**

inaugural encounter between Peter Parker and Ultimate Universe web-spinner Miles Morales, 2012's *Spider-Men* miniseries stood out as a poignant character study. It would be difficult for this sequel – which sees Miles, post-*Secret Wars*, now ensconced in the main Marvel Universe – to feel quite so fresh. Nevertheless, the first three issues have their moments – the best being the personal interchanges between Miles and best mate Ganke, and meeting future love interest Barbara Rodriguez.

Stressing that their arachnid abilities are not indistinguishable

(issue one's opening scenes see Miles using his Mega Venom Blast to great effect), Brian Bendis establishes a lively chemistry between the Spider-Men. With the fractured narrative shifting between timeframes, he gradually teases out the different plot strands, so this five-parter has yet to really come to a head.

The series follows on from the first run's intriguing cliffhanger about the identity of Miles's mysterious classic Universe counterpart, whom he has yet to actually cross paths with. With shades of *Secret Empire*'s Bad Cap, "the Other Miles" is revealed to be an older, scar-faced mob enforcer whose ties to the Kingpin are extensively detailed in issue #3.

But while the story is a slow burn, Sara Pichelli's visceral, fluid art is outstanding from the start. Aided by Justin Ponsor's evocative colours, she proves herself equally adept at depicting dynamic action as she is the verbose talkier scenes. A welcome if not spectacular reunion, that will hopefully pay off in the final stretch. **Stephen Jewell**

“Bendis teases out the different plot strands”

**i** After Peter Parker "guggled" Miles in the original series, here he uses a "Starkle" search engine.



## MISTER MIRACLE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Publisher **DC Comics**

► Writer **Tom King**

► Artist **Mitch Gerads**

**ISSUES 1-3** **Jack Kirby's Fourth**

*World* saga was one of the original comic book epics, a gloriously bonkers mix of mythology and superheroics that's still influential. Among the characters Kirby created for it was Mister Miracle, aka Scott Free, a legendary escape artist with a troubled history, inspired by the early illusionist career of artist Jim Steranko. Now this new 12-issue miniseries is exploring Kirby's hero in a surprising amount of depth.

This is a dark and violent tale that follows Scott as he's brought back to the world of New Genesis to act as a general in the war against the evil Darkseid. The battle is soon pushing Scott to breaking point, forcing him to confront his fellow "New God" Orion, but this is just as much a psychological story, teasing out the more provocative themes of Kirby's ground-breaking work.

Three issues in, Tom King's script is the equal of his work on acclaimed Marvel miniseries *The Vision*, bringing a maturity to the story that's perfectly matched by Mitch Gerad's atmospheric, imaginative art.

DC has been sensibly using the miniseries format to give creators free rein without continuity constraints; it's a strategy that pays off magnificently here, with a comic that's already looking to be one of the most ambitious superhero stories of recent years. **Saxon Bullock**



## MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF WAR



Hold that fort



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Reviewed on PS4

► Also on Xbox One, PC

► Publisher Warner Bros

**VIDEOGAME** Initially, as you scurry around Minas Ithil, capturing towers and doing missions for people you struggle to care about, *Shadows Of War* will have you questioning whether the Middle-earth series peaked with 2014's *Shadow Of Mordor*. But a couple of hours in it reveals a widened web of systems that embed you deep in the chaos of orcs politics. And you'll soon find that Aragorn knock-off Talion and elf-wraith sidekick Celebrimbor are just a convenient tool for interacting with orcs – dismembering them; building relationships with them through conquest, betrayal and combat; listening as they hurl invective at you. These interactions feel

genuinely intimate, and you'll feel gutted when an orc you were desperate to recruit gets cut down by one of your captains, or one of your top generals betrays you, forcing you into a fight that ends with you cleaving him in two.

At the same time as things have become more intimate, they've expanded in the way of warfare. You can send dominated orcs to ambush other orcs, backstab Warchiefs, and level up by fighting to the death in fighting pits. It's now a game of scheming as well as hand-to-hand combat.

Eventually, you build up an army ready to assault one of the five regions' major forts. You assign your orc leaders troops, caravans and siege equipment, then charge into battle alongside them. Combat is much the same as before: some new moves – like firing arrows in mid-air – have been added, and others removed. The net result is positive.

There is a plot amidst all this. Talion has forged a new ring of power, which Celebrimbor believes could prevent the latter from turning into a dark lord. This unfolds over several separate questlines. But running around Mordor and building an army is the meat of the game.

The game doesn't really show what's new until a good three hours in, and the menu screens are

“Building an army is the meat of the game”

slow and confusing. But these are minor faults in a game that does exactly what it needed to: turn its predecessor's best idea into a ruthless, rewarding gameplay loop. You're always anticipating that next betrayal, grooming that next commander, besieging forts, or levelling up. Mordor may not be a pretty place, but you won't want to leave for a long time. **Robert Zak**

**i** Listen carefully to the Uruk captains and you may hear voice actor Troy Baker do his Joker voice from *Arkham Origins*.



## DON'T LOOK NOW



► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

35 minutes | CD/Vinyl

Vinyl released 22 December

► Label Silva Screen

**SOUNDTRACK** The result of a chance meeting with a producer in Venice, Pino Donaggio's compositions for Nicolas Roeg's eerie tale of predestination were his first stab at a cinematic score.

In terms of value for money, it's a little frustrating, as over half its 16 tracks are variations on two themes (those for Donald Sutherland and Julie Christie's grieving parents). But there are some interesting variations, and plenty of discrete cues which have real power: the ominous bass and vulpine howls of “Christine Is Dead”, backing for John's discovery of his drowned daughter; the helter-skelter swirling strings of “Searching For Laura”, accompaniment to a mad dash around Venetian alleyways. The hesitant piano-playing in several tracks is an interesting choice, adding a sense of innocence and fragility (apparently Roeg wanted them to sound like a little girl still learning to play). Completists will also appreciate the inclusion of a vocal version of “Laura's Theme” (originally released on the Italian soundtrack LP), with singer Iva Zanicchi belting it out over Scott Walker-esque production.

The standout, however, is the cue for the infamous love scene, which proceeds from tenderly plucked guitar and fuzzy flute to full-on erotic stampede. It's no wonder Brian De Palma was sufficiently impressed to seek out Donaggio to collaborate on *Carrie*. **Ian Berriman**



We warned you not to get a dragon as a house pet.





## THE UNQUENCHABLE THIRST OF DRACULA

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

87 minutes | Available on iPlayer

► Broadcaster Radio Four

**RADIO DRAMA** Before

Christopher Lee's Dracula was revived in the modern-day for *Dracula AD 1972*, there was a plan to send him to India. It got as far as a screenplay, originally titled *Dracula, High Priest Of The Vampires*. Only after the studio's script archive was donated to De Montfort University did selected members of the public get to experience it, via a reading. Now anyone can, thanks to this full-cast dramatisation.

Set in 1934, it's a fascinating curio, albeit one which only really breaks new ground when it comes to the settings (a decaying palace; caves full of erotic carvings) and the cast of characters (the protagonist is a young woman, and Dracula's the only Old White Guy to be found). Beneath the "exotic" trappings of saris, sitar music and hissing cobras lies a pretty traditional tale of vampiric seduction and ritual sacrifice.

It's a shame Dracula doesn't have much to do. Someone who most certainly does is Michael Sheen, who dominates proceedings as narrator of the stage directions, declaiming them with urgency and relish. The Hammer archive contains another 70 unmade scripts, including the likes of *Kali*, *Devil-Bride Of Dracula* and *Nessie*. Here's hoping we'll hear more of them. **Ian Berriman**



A phoenix from a 13th century bestiary.

## HARRY POTTER: A HISTORY OF MAGIC

### Chamber of Secrets

★★★★★

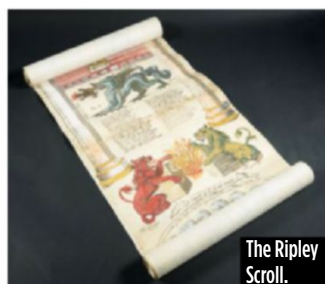
► **OPEN UNTIL 28 FEBRUARY**

► Venue The British Library

► Ticket price Adults £16, concessions £5-11

**EXHIBITION** Based, fittingly, in

King's Cross, the British Library's *Harry Potter* exhibition functions both as a 20th anniversary celebration of the series, and an academic exploration of its concepts and themes. For example, in one room you'll find JK Rowling's original pitch for *Harry Potter And The Philosopher's Stone*, alongside sketches of Hogwarts, while in another you'll find the Ripley Scroll: a six-metre-long manuscript from the 1500s that apparently holds the secrets to the elixir of life.



The Ripley Scroll.

Curated with elegance and affection, it's an essential visit for fans both big and small, taking great care to balance the informative with the dynamic. There's twinkly music, there's flying books, there's a game to test your potion-making skills, and another which allows you to get your fortune read, along with an array of beautiful portraits by artist Jim Kay, and an amazing opportunity to see Harry's invisibility cloak with your own eyes. Who would have known that it looks so much like an empty cabinet?

Is this a case of "come for Harry Potter, stay for the ancient Chinese oracle bones"? Possibly. But it's impressive how the history complements the fiction; not only in terms of providing context for the books, but as an insight into how we, as a species, try to rationalise the world and the things that happen in it. It may be mere entertainment now, but there was a time when magic was real – you just had to believe in it.

**Stephen Kelly**

**i** The *Philosopher's Stone's* Nicolas Flamel was based on a real alchemist. His tombstone is on display.



## WARHAMMER UNDERWORLDS: SHADESPIRE

★★★★★

► **RELEASED OUT NOW!**

► Two players

► Publisher Games Workshop

**TABLE-TOP GAME** *Shadespire*

marks a first venture into the world of deck-building for Games Workshop – inspired, no doubt, by the success of titles like *Dominion*. It combines customising-your-hand-of-cards with the company's miniatures, and a setting rooted in the *Age Of Sigmar* world.

Players control one of two opposing warbands (more can join in with expansion packs). In the box these are the sturdy, upstanding Stormcast Eternals and the none-more-metal Khorne Bloodbound. Each side must duke it out while also obtaining objectives in order to accumulate honour points. The side with the most at the end wins – even if all of their warriors have been slain!

The focus is on fast-paced play. Each side has only a handful of miniatures, and the three-turn limit means that every movement, attack or objective retrieval has to be carefully considered. The deck-building aspect, meanwhile, enables you to add character upgrades and ploys.

The miniatures are terrific, with different colours for each of the warbands. There's always been an emphasis with Games Workshop products on painting your models, but these look great as they are. The game feels, perhaps, a little limited in scope, but expect that to change as the system is filled out with expansion packs. **Will Salmon**





## COLLECTABLES

Things we've been playing with this month

**1** Two essential items of *Doctor Who* iconography are immortalised in these **Dalek and TARDIS dogtags** (RRP £8.99). The detail is impressive: the Doctor's trusty time ship has the words POLICE BOX etched in tiny letters (and the right number of panels and windowframes, we add, twitching in pedantic satisfaction) while the Dalek is a beaut, even offering

a saucy peek at its underside. They're called dogtags but we imagine they're equally at home at the disco, possibly nestling among some chest hair, as they are on the battlefield.

**2** This **Justice League glass mug** (FPI price £8.99; product code H2938) from our neighbours Half Moon Bay (waves out of the window at the

other side of Bath) features imagery of Justice League members Aquaman, the Flash, Batman, Superman, Green Lantern, Cyborg and Wonder Woman – all of whom are wearing expressions of steely determination. Can they sense battle approaching? The art has an appealing pop art vibe, and the glass has a sturdy weight to it. No danger of spillages here!

**3** These **Rock Candy vinyl figures** (FPI price £12.99; product codes H3640, H3641) are just what the '90s revival demands. Buffy takes a break from studying to patrol the cemeteries of Sunnydale, a stake freshly sharpened and black boots donned. Meanwhile, Willow is ready for class in her fuzzy pink outfit from season three episode "Doppelgangland" – though we're not 100% sure if it's really her or her evil vampire counterpart. We have some holy water at the ready, just in case.

**4** Curl up at night snuggling a super-team with these **Justice League plushies** (FPI price £10.99; product codes H4018, H4019, H4020).



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# Reviews



Aquaman's our firm favourite, thanks to his corduroy-effect hair and strokeably furry goatee. Wondering where Superman is? Well, he's not in the film is he, obviously, because he's dead. That could never happen. But the main reason he and Batman are absent is because Funko brought out plushies of both yonks ago.

**5** We're not sure why you'd ever put your ID in these **Star Wars passport wallets** (FPI price £14.99 each; product codes H2926, H2927), seeing as they make it three times bulkier than it needs to be. The designs are great, though, and the slogans inside ("The Force is strong with this one"/"This is not the droid you're looking for") are a

nice touch. But what we really need is an Obi-Wan Kenobi version saying, "You don't need to see his identification". Yep, we're sure that'll work on a surly US border guard...

**6** We generally associate the Joker with stealing money, but these **DC chibi coin banks** (FPI price £10.99; product codes H4018, H4019, H4020) recast the Clown Prince of Crime as a proponent of sensible saving. ("Chibi", for the uninformed, is a Japanese word for "short" now synonymous with cute, "super-deformed" stylings). Just one problem: with the Joker (though not Harley Quinn and Wonder Woman), the coin slot's on the back of the tiny body, not the giant

head, which means you'll have to empty him after putting in about 15 coins! What's the point?!

**7** It feels entirely appropriate that the stars of '80s retrogasm *Stranger Things* should be recreated as toys consistent with the era. What these **Funko action figures** (FPI price £17.99 per set of three; product codes H3479, H3480) lack in points of articulation and detail (Dustin looks remarkably like a stern fiftysomething woman) is more than made up for by their old-school charm. We're also liking Eleven's perpetual nosebleed and Eggo accessories – though Dustin and Will should be annoyed that they're only considered worthy of rucksacks. ●

## THINGS TO COME

More goodies on their way soon



**HELLBOY PLUSHIES**  
◆ This Funko range turns Mike Mignola's creations into cuddly toys. Choose between Hellboy's amphibious chum Abe Sapien, pyrokinetic agent Liz Sherman and two versions of Big Red – one with horns, one with them sawn off.



**DEADPOOL FIGURE**  
◆ We're digging the retro stylings of this 8" dolly of the Merc with a Mouth. It comes with a choice of three outfits: Marvel NOW cossie, Weapon-X look, or pirate costume complete with skull and crossbones-embellished tricorn.



**CAPTAIN SCARLET FIGURE**  
◆ This 1:6 replica is one of three Gerry Anderson figures coming from Big Chief Studios. Featuring 30 points of articulation, it comes with an illuminating display base. Arriving in April: *Thunderbirds* pilots Virgil and Scott Tracy.

Photography by Olly Curtis



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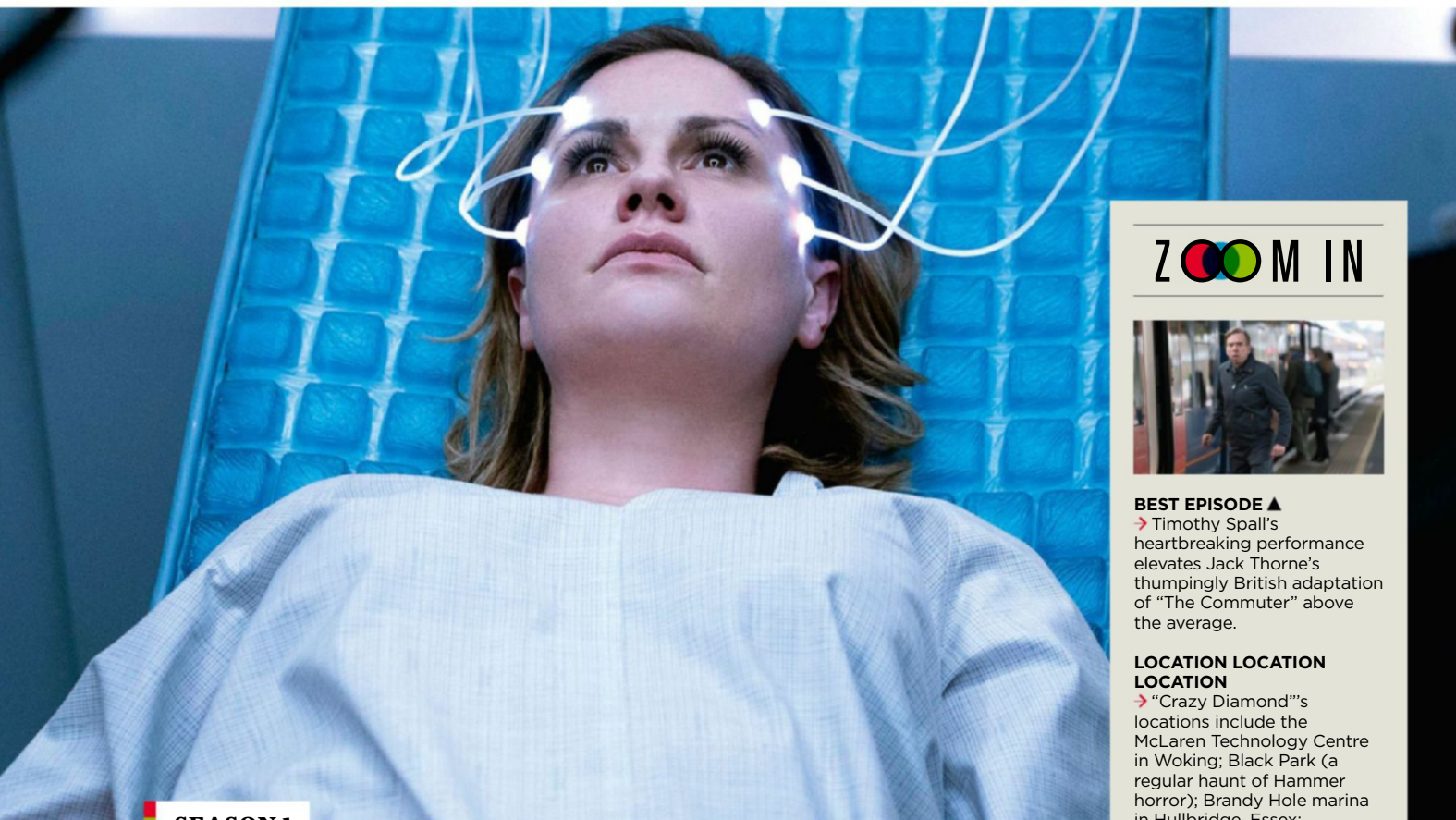
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SEASON 1

## ELECTRIC DREAMS

### Total Rehaul

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you'll go to for  
youthful skin.

► **UK Broadcast** Channel 4, on hiatus  
► **US Broadcast** Amazon Prime  
► **Episodes Reviewed** 1.01-1.06

❖ **In one sense it's surprising** that no one's done an anthology TV series based on the short stories of Philip K Dick before. We are, after all, talking about the author whose works have inspired *nine* sci-fi movies, most notably *Blade Runner*. On the other hand, it's kinda understandable, given the inherent problems.

For one thing, Dick's SF short stories – first published in mags like *Amazing* and *Imagination* – are slender affairs, generally

running to no more than 10 or 12 pages. That didn't stop them being expanded to feature-length films for the likes of *Total Recall* and *Minority Report*, of course. But it does present a challenge.

It's one this US/British co-production's diverse roster of writers and directors approach in varying ways. Some simply sling out the original altogether: regular Terry Gilliam collaborator Tony Grisoni's "Crazy Diamond" has practically nothing in common with "Sales Pitch", barring a couple of character names and the vague notion of a worker yearning for escape. And many of its new

elements, like food stuffs which go off in a day, go absolutely nowhere.

Alternatively you can use the basic concept as a foundation, then build a brand-new, more fantastical ending, like someone adding a conservatory to their house. That's the approach of *The Night Manager* scribe David Farr's "Impossible Planet", which adds romanticised eternal recurrence to Dick's slight tale of an elderly woman who demands to be taken to the non-existent planet Earth. Or, you can just stretch it all out, like Jessica Mecklenburg's take on "Human Is", which dramatises the story of a woman whose soldier

## ZOOM IN



### BEST EPISODE ▲

► Timothy Spall's heartbreaking performance elevates Jack Thorne's thumpingly British adaptation of "The Commuter" above the average.

### LOCATION LOCATION LOCATION

► "Crazy Diamond"'s locations include the McLaren Technology Centre in Woking; Black Park (a regular haunt of Hammer horror); Brandy Hole marina in Hullbridge, Essex; Kimmeridge Bay in Dorset; and Dungeness Lighthouse.

### TITLE TATTLE

► "Crazy Diamond" nods to "Shine On You Crazy Diamond", a Pink Floyd song about original singer Syd Barrett – the record Ed plays is a cover of Barrett solo track "Octopus", by Graham Coxon and Robyn Hitchcock.

### BEST LINE

► Paula in "Real Life" (1.05): "Trust me, you're not really a lesbian super-cop in the future in a flying car!"

### IT'S WOSSERNAME! ▼

► The pig-woman in "Crazy Diamond" is Joanna Scanlan, who was press secretary Terri Coverley in *The Thick Of It*.







"Hey, baby, wanna see me dress up as Kylo Ren?"

husband returns from a mission to an alien planet *strangely altered* with courtroom drama. There's always a solution, and often it involves expanding the emotional dimension; collectively, these six instalments have a good deal more heart than their prose forebears.

The other obstacle is a little trickier to circumnavigate. The 10 stories selected (after a mid-season pause, *Electric Dreams* is set to return in early 2018 with adaptations of "The Hanging Stranger", "Autofac", "Foster, You're Dead!" and "The Father-Thing") were originally published in the mid-'50s, and – partly as a result of how influential Dick has been, and partly because of all those previous adaptations – their tropes now feel very familiar.

That's not to say that these stories have no contemporary resonance, mind – we're still fascinated by Dick's core concerns of identity and the nature of reality. And the vague sense of déjà vu that tends to swell a few moments in is not altogether a bad thing. Quite often, watching *Electric Dreams* is as as cosily

“Dick's core concerns of identity and reality are fascinating”

predictable as slipping in a Blu-ray of *The Twilight Zone*. But there's no escaping the fact that the series' 20th century extrapolations of the future can't help but feel a little dated – particularly set against *Black Mirror*, whose stories are informed by developments Dick understandably never saw coming, such as social media.

Still, it remains consistently enjoyable. The production design is eye-pleasing, and it's a delight to see respected thespians like Timothy Spall and Steve Buscemi bringing the author's put-upon protagonists to life. Dick penned a total of 121 short stories; we'd quite happily watch *Electric Dreams* continuing to work through them for many years to come. **Ian Berriman**



The new season of *Autumnwatch* was controversial.

## ★ BEST IN SHOW ★ The characters who make TV great



### JASON MENDOZA

*The Good Place's* idiot DJ, who's mistaken for a Zen monk

► UK Broadcast Netflix, Fridays ► US Broadcast NBC, Thursdays

#### “I'm too young to die!

And too old to eat off the kids' menu!” whinges Jason Mendoza. The problem being, he *is* dead, so he's kinda stuck in that limbo. Except he's not in limbo, he's in Heaven. Or maybe Hell. In the twisty-turny afterlife of *The Good Place* you're never quite sure.

At the start of the series, everyone thinks Jason is a Zen monk called Jianyu Li. But “Heaven” made an administrative cock-up and gave Jianyu's place to Jason Mendoza – an amateur DJ, amateur hip-hop back-up dancer, amateur body spray inventor, Vine prankster and fake drug dealer (in his own words he was “pre-successful”). They shared the same IQ, you see – that of an eight-year-old. Jianyu had an excuse: he became a monk aged eight. Jason... well, he's just thick. He died suffocating (and allegedly masturbating) in a safe during a botched robbery.

But Jason is *adorably* thick, thanks to a charmingly childlike performance from Manny Jacinto – a child with ADD, admittedly. Often the “token idiot” in sitcoms can be irritating as hell, but Jacinto's Jason is like a little boy who you *should* tell off for being naughty, but are sniggering at because he's the only one at Christmas dinner brave enough to say, “Grandma just farted!”

When he's not delivering delightfully dumb lines, it's worth watching Jacinto's face as the others infodump. You can see him straining to keep up, before a dust mote or something distracts him and he's gone...

Having said all that, when he fell in love in Heaven's AI helper-bot Janet and married her it somehow felt like the show's most heartfelt relationship. Even if it was temporary and his wedding vows contained the line, “Send nude pics of your heart to me”... **Dave Golder**





"Fancy a slippery nipple?"

SEASON 1

## MIDNIGHT, TEXAS

Veil threats

► **UK Broadcast** Syfy UK, finished  
 ► **US Broadcast** NBC, finished  
 ► **Episodes Reviewed** 1.01-1.10

⚡ **Although *Midnight, Texas*** is based on a series of books by Charlaiane Harris – whose *Southern Vampires* series inspired *True Blood* – comparing the two shows is a pretty pointless exercise. Sure, they both contain supernatural beasts, but so do *Buffy*, *The Vampire Diaries*, *Teen Wolf* and *Being Human*. Tonally it's like neither *True Blood*'s intense and icky early years, or the camp carnival splatterfest of later years.

Instead, *Midnight, Texas* fills a *Grimm*-shaped hole; network-friendly, adult-aimed, gore-free supernatural horror. The trouble with sanitising supernatural horror is that you need to replace

the gore with something. The teen shows tend to go for a bit of relationship angst. *Buffy* also added wit. *Grimm* went for a police procedural approach. *Midnight, Texas* doesn't seem to have worked out how to fill the gap. It's affable. It's watchable. But it's far from appointment TV.

The central schtick is that on-the-run psychic Manfredo and his gravity-defying quiff take refuge in *Midnight, Texas* on the advice of his dead grandma (she still chats to him, you see). *Midnight* is a tiny town where many locals are supernaturals laying low: a priest who's also a weretiger; a vampire; a fallen angel; a demon; a witch. There's also an assassin. Just because. Everyone in town seems to have a dark secret, too – so much so that

you wouldn't be surprised if the barmaid turned out to be a Martian. Oh, and the town is on a Hellmouth, though for legal reasons it's called a "weakness in the veil between worlds".

All of which sounds promisingly quirky, but the show plays things straight. The characters are likeable enough, but none of them really grab your attention. Assassin Olivia shows spunky promise, which fades as the season goes on. The dialogue occasionally zings but settles for bland functionality.

While the show seems unable to work out if it's a serial or monster-of-the-week affair, the season finale delivers an action-packed, stylish and good-looking conclusion. It's just enough to make you hope a second season might find its groove. **Dave Golder**

### ZOOM IN



#### BEST EPISODE ▲

→ "Blinded By The Light" (1.06) – mainly thanks to the genuine twist about the identity of the serial killer.

#### TITLE TATTLE

→ Three episodes are named after classic rock tracks: "Bad Moon Rising" (Creedence Clearwater Revival), "Blinded By The Light" (Bruce Springsteen) and "Riders On The Storm" (The Doors).

#### POSITIVE DISCRIMINATION

→ In the books vampire Lemuel is a white guy, but the show's version – played by Ghanaian-British actor Peter Mensah – is way more interesting.

#### DULLEST CHARACTER

→ Yul Vazquez plays weretiger Rev Emilio Sheehan like a Roy Orbison tribute act who's recovering from some serious drug dependency problems.

#### BEST MOMENT ▼

→ Olivia's assassination gig in "Sexy Beast" (1.04), where she goes all Nikita on a guy in a glass elevator.





## LINE UP

The month's most quotable dialogue

YAPHIT

"Y'know, this may sound blunt but you are the only white woman I've ever found attractive."

LEVESQUE

"Well, you're the handsomest pile of cat puke I've ever seen."

*The Orville*, 1.05

LUCIFER  
(ON SEEING GIANT  
MODEL CHICKEN)

"Biggest cock I've ever seen."

*Lucifer*, 3.02

TAHANI

"I would say I outdid myself, but I'm always this good. So I simply did myself."

*The Good Place*, 2.05

BURNHAM

"I was raised on Vulcan and I attended the Vulcan Science Academy."

STAMETS

"My Uncle Everett plays in a Beatles cover band. It hardly makes him John Lennon."

*Star Trek: Discovery*, 1.03

RORY  
(TO JULIUS  
CAESAR)

"Your salad sucks."

*Legends Of Tomorrow*, 3.01



The invisible Rubik's Cube was proving difficult.

## WATCHING BRIEF

TV TALKING POINTS TACKLED

### Star Trek: Discovery is proving that Gene Roddenberry got it wrong



**Ian Berriman writes:**

After spending much of the '70s being hailed as a humanist visionary by fans, when Gene Roddenberry took charge of *The Next Generation* he laid down certain rules about how people in its future would behave, insisting that we'd have moved beyond petty conflict. Trouble is, drama kinda depends on conflict... And so began a long-running struggle between *Star Trek* producers and writers determined to keep Roddenberry's flame burning and those keen on slipping his shackles.

I've always supported the latter camp. Some of my favourite *Trek* moments showcase human behaviour that's far from enlightened: think of Kirk's borderline-racist resentment of the Klingons in *The Undiscovered Country*, or Picard's vengeful monomania in *First Contact*. So I'm delighted that *Star Trek: Discovery* has basically crammed the Roddenberry Rule into a wood chipper.

Never has a *Trek* series seen so many sparks flying. It's founded upon a shocking act of

mutiny. Its captain, Lorca, continually has to remind subordinates of the chain of command – generally in the manner of a man threatening to beat them with it. And in Anthony Rapp's Lieutenant Stamets – a man who labels his commanding officer a "warmonger" – it has the most waspish character in the franchise's history, a black belt in remarks so cutting they could slice you in half like a bat'leth.

It's exhilarating to hear Federation crew forcibly disagreeing! And because the series is set before Kirk's time, if you really *must* cling to the delusion that by the 24th century humanity will have evolved into a dreary, beige mulch of shiny happy people, you still can.

Purists are whining, of course. "This just isn't *Star Trek*!" they say. Bafflingly, many of them are the same folk who used to moan that the franchise was stuck in a rut. What do you want, people? Do you want a Xerox of the '90s, or something that feels edgy and daringly fresh? Personally, I'll take actual drama over naïve hippy idealism any day. ●

*Star Trek: Discovery* is streaming on Netflix in the UK now.



## SPURIOUS AWARDS

Celebrating the silliest and strangest moments from the month in TV



### FACIAL EXPRESSION OF THE MONTH

You'd pull a face like this too if the Devil had his hand up your backside (*Lucifer* 3.02).



### MEDICAL EMERGENCY OF THE MONTH

Some fish bones are hard to dislodge, Michael discovers in *The Good Place* 2.01.



### SOAP STORYLINE OF THE MONTH

Conjoined twins really confused about their parentage in *Legends Of Tomorrow* 3.02.



### METAPHOR OF THE MONTH

Maximus lays a giant egg in *Inhumans* 1.02. Presumably it'll hatch into a massive turkey...



### MISUNDERSTANDING OF THE MONTH

Jamie takes the invitation to a stag night a bit too literally in *Outlander* 3.02.



### LAX HYGIENE OF THE MONTH

Lieutenant Stamets *really* needs to use some Head & Shoulders (*Star Trek: Discovery* 1.03).



### GUEST STAR OF THE MONTH

The Elephant Man's daughter stars in both *The Exorcist* 2.01 and *Electric Dreams* 1.01.



### WORST DANCE ROUTINE OF THE MONTH

The Master fails to inspire his vampire troops into joining him in a rendition of "YMCA" (*The Strain* 4.09).



### TRAFFIC JAM OF THE MONTH

M25 in the post-apocalyptic world looks like the M25 in the pre-apocalyptic world in *The Shannara Chronicles* 2.01.



### AUDITION OF THE MONTH

With a *Wizard Of Oz* remake in the pipeline, the Scarecrow gives "If I Only Had A Brain" all he's got (*Gotham* 4.02).



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# SCOTLAND

Celebrate St Andrew's Day with these  
thistle-themed teasers

Quizmaster Nick Setchfield, Features Editor

## QUESTION 1

Sean Connery played Dr Henry Jones Sr in *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*. What's his phobia?

## QUESTION 2

Who wrote *The Strange Case Of Dr Jekyll And Mr Hyde*?

## QUESTION 3

Clare Grogan played Kochanski in *Red Dwarf* – how was she credited?

## QUESTION 4 PICTURE QUESTION

Which Scottish X-Men character is this?

## QUESTION 5

Who played the Kurgan in *Highlander*?

## QUESTION 6

*Outlander* is based on books by which author?

## QUESTION 7

Name the first book in Iain M Banks' *Culture* series.

## QUESTION 8 PICTURE QUESTION

What was the name of this Loch Ness monster from *Doctor Who*?

## QUESTION 9

*Zenith*, *The Invisibles*, *Arkham Asylum* – all by which Glasgow-born writer?

## QUESTION 10

Ian Fleming gave James Bond a Scottish father. Name him.

## QUESTION 11

Scotty appeared in which episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*?

## QUESTION 12 PICTURE QUESTION

Name the remote Hebridean island that lured Sergeant Howie in *The Wicker Man*.

## QUESTION 4



## QUESTION 12

## QUESTION 13

Steed and Mrs Peel visited Scotland in which 1965 episode?

## QUESTION 14

Who directed 2013's Scotland-set SF tale *Under The Skin*, in which Scarlett Johansson plays an alien who preys on lone men?



## QUESTION 8



## QUESTION 16

## QUESTION 15

In which *Doctor Who* adventure did Jamie first appear?

## QUESTION 16 PICTURE QUESTION

Who played Super Gran in the '80s kids series of the same name?

## QUESTION 17

Which Scottish comics creator received an MBE in 2013?

## QUESTION 18

*The Star Fraction*, *Cosmonaut Keep* and *The Cassini Division* – novels by which Stornoway-born author?

## QUESTION 19

What's the full name of the Wombles' Scottish cousin?

## QUESTION 20

Nessie is revealed to be an experimental sub in which Sherlock Holmes movie?

Answers  
1 Rats 2 Robert Louis Stevenson 3 CP Grogan 4 Moira MacTaggart 5 Clancy Brown 6 Diana Gabaldon 7 *Consider Phlebas* 8 The Skarasen 9 Grant Morrison 10 Andrew Bond 11 'Relics' 12 Summerville 13 'Castle Death' 14 Jonathan Glazer 15 'The Highlanders' 16 Gudrun Ure 17 Mark Miller 18 Ken MacLeod 19 Cairngorm MacWomble the Terrible 20 *The Private Life Of Sherlock Holmes*

## How did you do?

Rank by Scottish delicacies

0-5

Mars Bar Supper

6-10

Irn Bru bars

11-15

Tattie scones

16-19

Lorne Sausage

20

Haggis





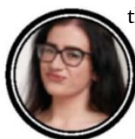
## THE ORIGINAL HARLEY QUINN

Kimberly Ballard, Production Editor

**H**arley Quinn isn't who you think she is. She's not just a clown-faced girl from the wrong side of town. She isn't just the Joker's girlfriend, or a sidekick to the clown prince. And she's not just a sex bomb in the form of Margot Robbie, with hotpants and a cheeky grin.

When Harley debuted in *Batman: The Animated Series* she was created to be the Joker's new accomplice. With her classic jester outfit and New Joisey accent, she was a delightfully ditzzy villain, gleefully wielding a huge hammer like it was a cuddly toy. She was also unhinged in a way that felt quite frightening, her ongoing obsession with Joker – who she affectionally called Mistah J – pushing her into doing anything to please him.

Harley also had some of the best moments on the show. In the episode “Harley’s Holiday” she knocks bullying mobster Boxy Bennett over the head with a stone fish, and in “Almost Got ‘Im”, lures Batman to a catfood factory, where she has Catwoman hostage. But there are times



the cartoon violence feels like a distraction, as her insecurity comes to the surface. Harley is a girl who'll do anything to be loved by Joker, a man who ignores or ridicules her to the point of abuse. This begins to change in the episode “Harley And Ivy”, where Harley meets fellow villain Poison Ivy for the first time. After the two women team up to escape the police, Ivy says

she'll teach her about self-esteem, leading to one of Harley's greatest moments: faced with grinning and wolf-whistling goons, Harley pulls out a rocket launcher and blows their car to smithereens.

In *Suicide Squad* and the recent DC animated movie *Batman And Harley Quinn*, Harley seems like a fraction of herself, less psychotic and more like the hot, weird girl. In *Batman: The Animated Series*, she is the best: a damaged, highly strung and faintly menacing girl who likes to cause a bit of mischief but ultimately just wants to be loved. ●

*Kimberly is adopting a hyena puppy called Pudding.*

### Fact Attack!

→ Harley Quinn creator Tim Gunn was inspired by a dream sequence in *Days Of Our Lives*, where Arleen Sorkin wears a jester costume.

→ Harley has also appeared in videogames, such as the *Arkham* series, where she has become the leader of one of Gotham's biggest gangs.

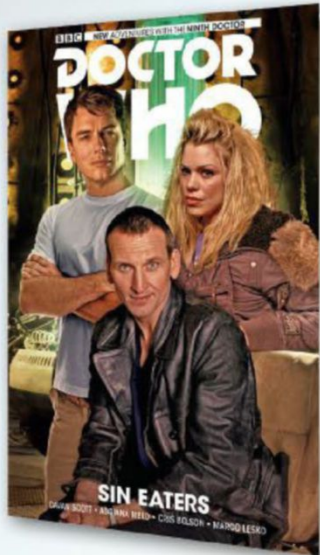
→ In the comics, Harley and Poison Ivy are a canonical couple, rescuing Harley from the abusive, stifling dynamic she had with Joker.

→ Margot Robbie will reprise the role Harley Quinn in *Gotham City Sirens*, which will see her teaming up with Catwoman and Poison Ivy.

SEE YOU  
NEXT MONTH!  
**6 DEC**  
DETAILS ON  
PAGE 33



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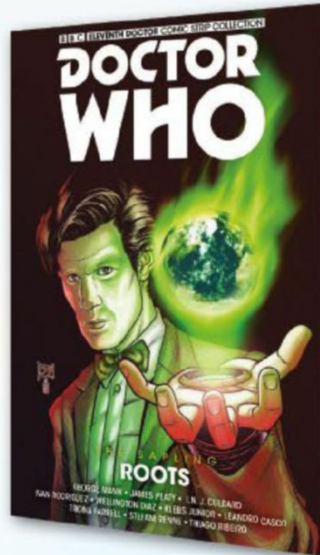


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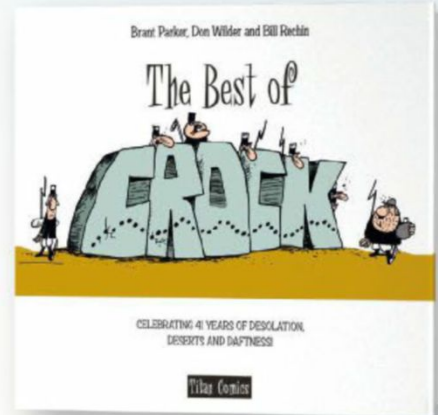


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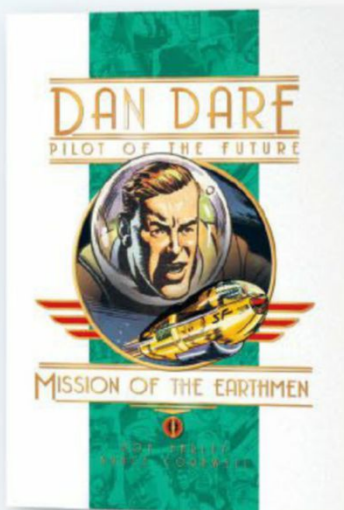


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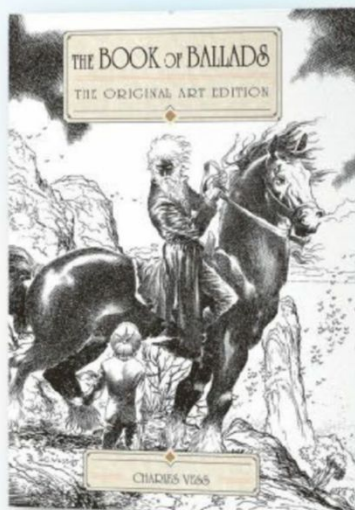


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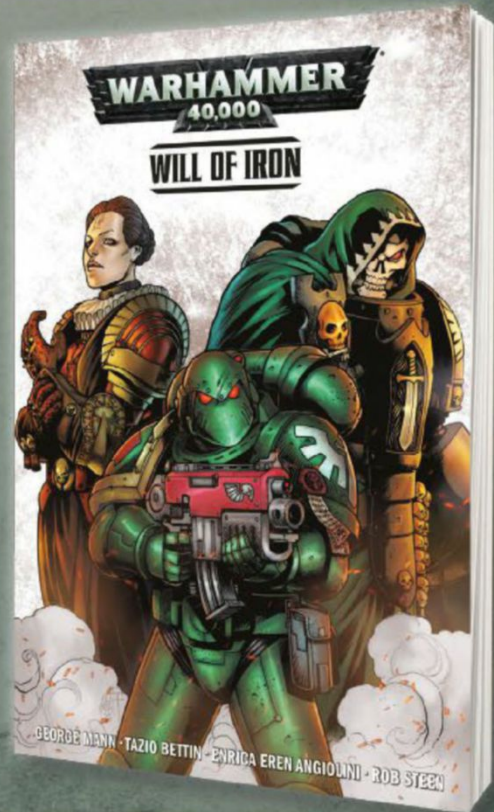
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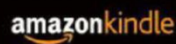
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